By Mrs CASHEL HOEY

ALL OR NOTHING

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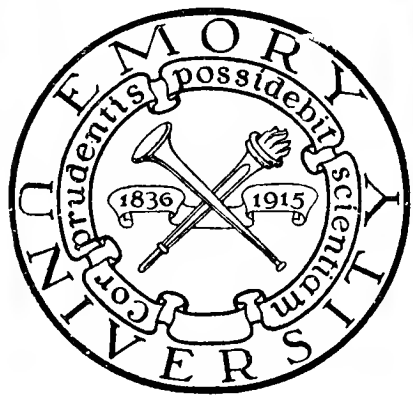

ALL, OR NOTHING

BY

MRS. CASHEL HOEY

AUTHOR OF

"GRIFFITH'S DOUBLE," "A GOLDEN SORROW," "THE BLOSSOMING OF AN ALOE," "THE LOVER'S CREED," "A STERN CHASE," "THE QUESTION OF CAIN," ETC.

"Thou shalt have no other gods but ME."

LONDON

SPENCER BLACKETT

(Successor to J. & R. Maxwell)

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THIS STORY IS DEDICATED TO THE BELOVED AND HONOURED MEMORY
OF
MY HUSBAND'S MOTHER,

WHO, FOR TWENTY YEARS, WAS MY MOST CONSTANT READER AND

MOST GENTLE CRITIC; AND WHO, TO THE END, FOUND

SOME SLIGHT SOLACE FOR PAIN IN ITS PAGES.

May she rest in peace.

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ALL, OR NOTHING.

CHAPTER I.

"NO PROMISE."

"NOT a minute after twelve o'clock, remember. A white gown never does suit you, and if, in addition to having to wear one, you're tired, you'll not look your best to-morrow."

"Very well, mamma; I won't sit up after twelve, I promise you—indeed, I'm tired now."

"Good-night, my dear." Lady Rosa Chumleigh frigidly kissed the smooth forehead dutifully bent to receive her salute, and turned to leave the room. "I shall send Brydges to you in twenty minutes."

"Oh, no; please don't, mamma," said the former speaker; "I would so much rather be alone to-night. I—I have something to do."

"Indeed, what is it?" Lady Rosa stood tall and awful on the threshold of her daughter's room. "I so particularly desired that nothing should be left to the last. Your boxes are all ready, I know, and the lists are made out. I cannot think what you can have got to attend to; not much of the trouble of this business has come upon you."

Lady Rosa spoke in a sharp, suspicious tone, and bent her brows in a frown which did not appear to be called for. Her daughter rejoined in a propitiatory manner:

"No, indeed, mamma; the trouble has been all yours, I'm sure, as it always is. But I didn't mean about my boxes, I am not going to disturb anything; it was only just a few little things Julia is to do for me after I am gone—keepsakes for the school-children and so on—and I haven't had time to write them down for her; that's all."

There was no reasonable fault to be found with this explanation, and Lady Rosa, without any repetition of the "Good-night" or the kiss, left the room. Her daughter held the door open until her mother had reached one at the opposite end of the corridor; then she closed it, but stood by it listening. In less than a minute the sound of a bell pulled by a strong hand came distinctly to her ears, when she noiselessly turned the key in the lock, and allowed her face to relax into an expression of relief.

"She won't come back, now she has rung for Brydges," thought the girl, as she seated herself before the dressing-table, and gazed into the draped looking-glass, without seeing the image it reflected; "I do wonder why it is one never can tell the exact truth to mamma. It's her temper, I suppose. It certainly isn't that she and I don't understand one another, for we do, perfectly. There has never been any mistake at all about 'this business,' as she calls it in her cool way. How like mamma that is, though; she never pretends, at any rate. I should not think there are many mothers who would talk of a daughter's marriage as 'this business,' especially to the daughter herself. I respect her for it, though I could not imitate it, but Mr. Thornton is right; it's that way of hers that has made and kept her what she is—'master an' mair,' as he says. After all, it will be such a relief to get away from her way, it's—it's almost worth it; at least, I mean it would be, even if there was nothing else."

She had spoken the last words in which her thoughts were framing themselves aloud, and her own voice roused

her. She sat upright, looked in the glass, with intention this time, and began to loosen the coils of her hair.

"Mamma's right in one thing," so ran her diverted thoughts; "I certainly shall not look my best to-morrow; I dare say I shall look about my worst"—a little satisfied smile crept round her red lips and full curved chin, as a dexterous imp, sent on a comforting mission by vanity, whispered that her worst would not be very alarming—"but I suppose no girl ever looks really well on her wedding-day."

The face and figure reflected in the glass were very charming at Laura Chumleigh's "best," and were calculated to recall Lady Rosa to the observer as little as could be wished. Laura was of small stature, slightly built without being thin, and endowed with the graceful carriage and beautiful hands and feet which are supposed to indicate "blue blood." There was some mistake about this in Laura's case, for her father's blood was not blue, and her mother's hands and feet were usefully ugly, as Lady Rosa did not hesitate to remark whenever the subject turned up in conversation. "Points, as vulgar people who frequent stables call them," she had been heard to say, "are all nonsense, like Irish eyes and Spanish ankles. There never was a *mésalliance* in the Ness family until I made one, and a commoner-looking lot of people are not to be seen anywhere, either in real life or picture galleries." Laura was content to have the "points," without caring at all about whether she was entitled to them on scientific principles, and she secretly rejoiced that she was totally unlike the noble family of Ness. Something vivid and gleeful about the girl added a delightful charm to her real and regular beauty; a dancing brightness in her shy, dark eyes; a suddenness in the smile that flashed all over her face, and touched her small teeth as light touches the facets of cut jewels; a richness in the red that came up to the velvet surface of her clear olive skin, of an almost southern tint;

while her profuse and glossy hair was of the very duskiest, warmest brown that ever escaped the harshness of black. Youth, perfect health, and high spirits are important elements in the composition of beauty, and all these Laura Chumleigh possessed. She was within a week of twenty, but she did not look a day over seventeen ; she could ride, and skate, and dance, as if life were nothing but a succession of opportunities for those exercises, and she had been created to indulge in them ; her supple and elegant little figure was full of strength and nerve, and she had never had as much as a headache since she got rid of her governess, and the "lessons" which she had always detested. She was not quite ignorant, however, because she really had natural intelligence ; and as the schoolroom-time had inexorably to be gone through, she found that it might be gone through more tolerably by learning something than by doing nothing. Lady Rosa was not to be "got over," and Laura's governess was not to be "got at ;" novels, except such as would have bored her dreadfully, were unattainable, and Lady Rosa, who took a singularly unprejudiced view of her daughter's character, had spoken to her as follows when she was just sixteen :

"You have no fortune, my dear, and there's none coming to you from anywhere. If you want to enjoy life you will have to marry well, and I have observed that silliness and ignorance do not take. Pretty idiots who can't spell or talk have plenty of partners, but men don't marry them. You had better make use of the year and a half there is before you."

The girl did not thoroughly understand her mother, perhaps, but she knew that she did wish to enjoy life, and that she would like to marry well ; and so, when she was introduced into society at seventeen and a half, she could spell, sing well enough for drawing-room purposes, and talk about general subjects with sufficient intelligence to gain her a character for cleverness, as it was combined with a very pretty and taking air of interest and eagerness. Not

unpleasant cleverness, be it understood—not bookishness, or strong-mindedness, or anything horridly peculiar of that kind—but just the sort of cleverness which, with everything else about her, might be best described as "charming!"

Laura had been out three seasons, and now, at the end of the third, she was marrying well. Lady Rosa was satisfied, but not elated. Things had gone well, although, of course, they might have gone better. It would have saved a great deal of money and trouble if Laura had married in her second season; but even Lady Rosa did not expect to have everything quite as she wished; although she did feel, when she was thwarted, that there must be a screw loose somewhere in the system of the universe. The eve of her daughter's wedding-day had now arrived, and not a hitch had occurred in the preliminaries. To-morrow would see Laura disposed of, if not according to the loftiest aspirations of Lady Rosa Chumleigh, at least in the very best manner that had been within her option, and the expensive furnished house in Lowndes Street might be given up.

Such were the pleasing reflections with which Lady Rosa Chumleigh left her daughter on the last night of the girl's home-life, after the maternal admonition in the interests of a becoming bridal bloom on the morrow; such were the circumstances under which Laura sat brushing her hair before the glass, with "something to do" between that time and twelve o'clock.

Laura had brushed her hair until her arm ached, and then rolled it up into a tight ball, and taken it down to roll it up again into a looser; she had fidgeted with the bottles, boxes, and general inutilities upon her dressing-table; she had opened a tempting little velvet-covered, satin-lined case, in which lay a necklet of pearls with a diamond clasp, and closed it again hurriedly; she had fingered the smooth ivory binding of the pretty Prayer Book which had just been sent her as a wedding-present by the clergyman

who was to perform the marriage ceremony on the morrow, and inspected the anticipatory monogram on its clasp. She was dawdling, putting off the something which she had to do; but her thoughts were busy with it, whether she would or not, and at length she rose with a sigh, carried a chair across the room, and had just stepped up on it and stretched out her arm to reach some object which was put away out of sight on the dusty top of a gaunt, old-fashioned mahogany wardrobe, when she was disturbed by a gentle tap at the door. She stepped down from the chair, placed it against the wall, and unlocked the door in a moment.

"Papa!" she said, but not loudly, although she was surprised. It would have required more than surprise to make any member of her household forget the vicinity of Lady Rosa, or run the risk of disturbing her.

"Papa! Come in, dear papa!"

"I thought I should not disturb you," said Colonel Chumleigh, as he stepped into the room with noiselessness due to practice, "and I wanted to say good-night again."

Laura had quickly set a chair for her father, and she now perched herself lightly on his knee, and put her arms round his neck. The change in her face was very remarkable—it had softened and brightened.

"I'm so glad," she said, laying her richly-coloured cheek against his gray head; "I longed to say good-night by ourselves, but I did not think you would have managed it. How did you manage it, papa?"

"Well, darling, you see there was a good deal of confusion to-day, and things were put astray, and I had not seen the papers at all comfortably; and so I said I should stay down and read them for an hour, and——"

"And you came up to me instead. Papa"—she unlocked her arms from round his neck, and began to smooth his hair gently with her little dark hand—"there's

always an awful feeling about the last of everything, isn't there? No matter how little one cares for a person, it would give one a pang to be quite sure one had seen the last of that person, and it's the same about places and things that one does in one's own life. I am not a bit fond of this house; with other people's furniture and things in it, it isn't like home; and yet I have a solemn sort of feeling about this being the very last time I shall ever be here as I am now, only your daughter, you know, and a girl, with people to look after me, and no one for me to look after. I dare say you cannot understand the feeling, papa, because you're a man."

"Yes, I can," said the Colonel; "I understand it perfectly. What else do you suppose I have been thinking of all the evening, except that it is the last I shall ever in all my life have my Firefly with me, just as my own daughter, and nothing else?"

Laura pressed her lips upon his head with a sob.

"Hush! you must not do that," said the Colonel, frightened. "You must not cry to-night, my darling."

"No," said Laura, with a faint quiver of a smile; "red eyes would be less becoming still than a white gown." Then, without explaining the allusion, she went on: "No, we mustn't make each other miserable. Do you know, papa," she drew herself away from him now, so that she could look into his face, "I've been thinking the very best of 'this business,' as mamma calls it, is, that you can often come to me. We don't see much of each other—not comfortably, I mean—though we do live in the same house; but you will often come to me at my own, won't you?"

"I hope so."

"You must promise, papa. Not only for me, you know. Mr. Thornton likes you so much too."

"He is a very good fellow, Laura. I hope you will appreciate him, and be a good wife to him. He is giving you a great deal, my dear; I hope—I hope you will never

give him cause to regret his marriage." She had never seen her father so moved before.

"Indeed, I never will, papa. I wouldn't if it was only for fear of vexing you. He is a very good fellow; and I *am* awfully lucky."

She had risen from his knee, and was standing beside him while she said this. Colonel Chumleigh was one of the least articulate of men, partly from a natural slowness of speech, partly from habitual discretion; and though he knew what he would have liked to say to Laura on the present occasion—a golden opportunity, which by no earthly possibility could come again in their respective lives—he simply could not say it.

He was a tall, fine-looking man of fifty-five, very gray for his age, with a fair complexion, and kindly eyes, still blue and clear, and he looked just what he was—amiable and irresolute. A less portentous personage than Lady Rosa might have been "master an' mair" over Colonel Chumleigh, who had, and deserved, the name of a martinet in his regiment. After he had kissed his daughter many times, and left her, and was stepping noiselessly along the corridor to his dressing-room, he said to himself:

"I wish she had said 'happy' instead of 'lucky.' I wish it was more of a love-match; and yet"—the Colonel smiled at his own romantic, behind-the-times notions—"how often her mother has reminded me that ours was a love-match, and begged me to observe what has come of it."

After Laura had locked the door of her room for the second time that night, she picked up a newspaper, which had fallen out of her father's pocket. It was *The Morning Post* of that day. She laid it on her dressing-table without looking at it, and resumed the occupation that her father's coming had interrupted. She took down a small flat parcel from the top of the old wardrobe, blew the dust off it, and pushing aside all the things on the dressing-table, including

the case with the pearls, she untied the parcel, and arranged its contents before her.

These consisted of a small volume of selected poems, prettily bound in vellum with red edges, two or three ball programmes, a bill of the play of an amateur performance, printed on white satin, half-a-dozen letters directed to "Miss Chumleigh," but without postmarks, and an unframed photograph of a young man dressed in yachting clothes. Having laid these things out in two lines, as a fortune-teller "lays the cards," Laura put her elbows on the table—one of them was resting on the newspaper, its dusky dimples touched the list of deaths for the day—and leaning her forehead on her joined hands, looked at them intently.

"It would not be right to keep them," she said to herself; "I have made up my mind all along that they must go. I dare say Mr. Thornton wouldn't care a bit, if he knew about them, but he does not know, and I cannot tell him now, when I did not tell him at first. He would not understand; men never do." This was a fixed belief of Lady Rosa's; and Laura had adopted it, as an easy and convenient dogma, with confidence which she did not invariably extend to her mother's notions.

Presently she leaned back in her chair, took up the little vellum-bound volume of poetry, and turned over the red-edged leaves. The margins were broad, the type was quaint; the daintiest initial letters adorned the sweetest possible utterances of passion, of hope, of constancy; and a goodly number of reckless and deeply-scored pencil marks, a few scribbled comments, with a date or two, profaned the cream-tinted margins. Laura glanced at some of these comments, and the colour deepened on her cheeks; she fluttered the leaves, and turned to the title-page. On the opposite leaf two big capital letters were written in a bold hand. They were L. C.

"I ought to burn it," so ran her thoughts, "but it's a pity; all the verses I care about are there—besides, there's

no fire, and I should be a long time about burning it in the candle, leaf by leaf. I think I need not destroy it, if I rub out all the writing carefully. Yes, that's what I'll do—it will fit under the tray of that horrid big dressing-case—but this must go."

She cut out the leaf with the capital letters upon it, slipped the little volume into the pocket of her dressing-gown, and went on with her task of inspection. After one quick glance at it she had placed the photograph face downwards, but she looked through the playbill, and the ball programmes, lingeringly and musingly. It was now the turn of the letters, and Laura drew first one, then another, from its envelope; but she put them back unread.

"No, no; I must not, I resolved I would not. And why should I, even if it was not wrong; for I know them all by heart."

She made a little pile of them on the top of the photograph, and laid her face upon the pile. Her heart beat quickly, her light and shallow nature was stirred by fear, like that she had often felt, when a child, at finding herself in the dark, and which had made her say "Our Father" as quickly as she could get the words out. She said them now, right on to the end, half aloud, and rapidly, like a charm; and when the last word was uttered, she gathered up the little heap and the other things, threw them into the fender, and set a light to them. Kneeling on the hearth-rug she watched them burning; she had to hold the taper down to the half-charred papers, and relight them more than once.

As the last morsel of white edge turned to black crispness, and curled itself up, a harmless pinch of dust, the big clock on the stairs and the little one on Laura's table came to terms about the time, and simultaneously announced twelve o'clock. Laura got up off the hearthrug, opened the ponderous dressing-case which Lady Rosa had inflicted on her—it was an ancient chattel of the noble house of

Ness—and thrust the little vellum-bound volume under the second tray; took out of a drawer several small packets neatly made up, and addressed in her own writing, and having disposed them in evidence for Lady Rosa's inquisitorial inspection in the morning, contrived to keep her promise to her mother very nearly.

It was, however, long before she slept. The clocks had expressed their onemindedness about the hour three times after midnight, and still Laura Chumleigh lay wide awake, with her hands clasped behind her head and her dark eyes gazing out towards the late summer dawn, and more than once she said to herself, while the strange trouble again crept over her: "I never said I would wait! It was no promise!"

CHAPTER II.

IN "THE MORNING POST."

In the best regulated household there will be an upsetting of the ordinary course of things, on the occasion of a wedding in the family. The Chumleigh household was not remarkably well regulated—though, perhaps because—Lady Rosa was her own housekeeper. She prided herself on this fact, and gloried in the conviction that those wretches of tradespeople could not take her in, and there was no wastery in her kitchen. The household, including the Colonel and Laura, had had a good deal to suffer during the preliminaries for the wedding of the only daughter of the house, and there was a pretty general feeling that it would be a mercy when it was over. This sentiment was also shared by the Colonel and by Laura; and, indeed, the latter had wished many times that the good old custom of a honeymoon with a third for company had been still in

fashion, and that her father might have had a holiday on the occasion, in the society of herself and Mr. Thornton. To be sure she could not find a precedent in any memoirs or novels which treated of those bygone days, when people used sedan-chairs, and journeyed to "*the* Bath." It was always the bridesmaid who occupied the third seat in the post-chaise.

The wedding, which was to take place at a fashionable and ugly church near Lowndes Street, was fixed for eleven o'clock; and there did not seem to be any particular reason why the whole Chumleigh household should be astir several hours before the event. No reason, however, could practically be more particular than the will and pleasure of Lady Rosa Chumleigh. So the note of preparation was sounded betimes and Laura was aroused from her insufficient slumber by her mother in person.

Lady Rosa had as little nonsense about her as the mother of Mr. Edmund Sparkler herself. She never followed the movements, listened to the words, or watched the looks of her beautiful young daughter with that silent, almost stealthy delight which is one of the deep delights of motherhood, and is enhanced by the unconsciousness of its object. She had never stood by the fair sleeper in the quiet night, listening to her even breathing, gazing at her restful face, as if this were some special miracle of nature wrought for herself alone of all the women in the world. She occasionally made domiciliary visits to Laura's room indeed, but they had practical purposes—at night, to see whether Laura had really put her candles out, or was breaking the domestic law by reading in bed; in the daytime, to inspect the state of tidiness of the apartment.

Lady Rosa opened the door of Laura's room with her usual uncompromising decision, and called out, as she pulled up a venetian blind with a great bang:

"Laura, my dear! Laura! Time to get up. Isidor comes at nine, you know."

Laura sat up with a start, and her mother looked at her sharply.

"H—m," she said, "your eyelids are quite red, and you look as if you had not had half enough sleep."

"I'm all right, mamma, thank you," said Laura, rubbing the tell-tale eyelids.

"You had better lie still till you've had some tea, if there's any to be had." Lady Rosa pulled the bell-rope at the head of Laura's bed so vehemently that it was a wonder it did not come down, and went on to suppose they would be an hour about bringing the tea, and that she should not be surprised if there were nobody up in the house except herself and Brydges. Laura was mildly protesting that she did not want any tea, and would be ready in plenty of time for the ministrations of the hair-dresser, when her mother's attention was diverted into another channel by the sight of *The Morning Post*, which lay on the dressing-table. Laura knew perfectly well that Lady Rosa did not allow newspapers to be removed from the "library"—a back parlour of the furnished house. It was very extraordinary that she never could be obeyed in anything.

"I believe mamma would scold me about nothing, if I were going to be hanged," thought poor Laura; she was beginning to offer a vague excuse, which should not compromise the Colonel, when Lady Rosa, who had taken up the newspaper, cut the awkward explanation short by walking out of the room. Laura looked after her in some surprise, and presently heard the door at the end of the corridor opened and shut.

"Much ado about nothing," said the girl to herself, "and just as if this were any ordinary day in one's life!"

Here Brydges entered the room, and the business of the hour was begun.

Laura would have been much more surprised if she could have seen the discomposure of Lady Rosa's coun-

tenance when she reached her own room, and felt herself free from observation. She sank into the first chair she came to, and allowed the hand which held the newspaper to hang by her side, while she covered her eyes for a moment with the other. After awhile she seemed to recover herself, and looked attentively at a certain part of the outer sheet of the newspaper.

"No doubt at all about it," she said to herself; "there it is, plain enough! What an unfortunate coincidence; how dreadfully unlucky; has she seen it? I think not; I hope not. She could not be so unconcerned; she could hardly have self-command enough to put on such unconcern. And yet, how extraordinary it would be if she has not seen it, before her face, under her eyes, as it must have been! What shall I do? On the whole, which is most probable? that she has seen it, but has pride and cunning enough to prevent my finding that out—her eyelids were red; I'm almost sure she had been crying, and I'm quite sure she had been lying awake—or that the printed lines lay under her eyes, and she did not see them."

Again Lady Rosa read those printed lines, and now she rose and paced the room, still holding the newspaper in her hand. Her face was plain and unamiable, with hard lines about it, narrow eyes, and a long upper lip, and the look of doubt and discomfiture it now wore was not beautifying.

"I can't do anything," so ran her thoughts. "Whether she knows or does not know, I cannot do anything. At least, I can only prevent her seeing it, if she does not know already. And if she does, it cannot be helped. Under any circumstances, what has happened is all for the best, and I have nothing to regret. Robert Thornton is worth a dozen of him."

Then Lady Rosa locked up *The Morning Post* of the previous day in a drawer of her writing-table, and having recovered her self-possession, she emerged upon the scene of activity. Laura was almost dressed before her mother

again entered her room ; the final touches only were wanting to her bridal attire, and she was looking exceedingly lovely, in spite of the red eyelids and the white gown. Isidor had outdone himself ; he was an enthusiast in his art, and he seldom had such a "subject" as Laura's shapely head. Mrs. Mason had "idealised a wedding-gown, fit for an angel like Laura," according to Laura's cousin and bridesmaid, Julia Carmichael, who was enthusiastic, rather than accurate of speech, and one of Alphonse Karr's exquisite bouquets had arrived from Nice, in perfect preservation.

"I am so glad you have come, mamma," said Laura, with a smile, as she turned towards her mother her beautiful head, from which a cloud of lace drooped to the edge of her gown, "to settle the question of ornaments or no ornaments. Julia votes for the pearls, but I do not like them in the morning."

"Did Mr. Thornton say nothing about his wishing you to wear them ?"

"Not a word ; but I am sure he would agree with me ; he always does, you know, and he has such excellent taste."

"Then don't wear them, my dear. Your dress is perfect, and now I must go and get my gown on."

"She did not stay a minute in the room," whispered Laura to Julia Carmichael, who was reluctantly putting the pearls back into their case ; "and she looked somehow as if she could not. I really do think she feels my going away at last."

"She knows nothing at all about it," thought Lady Rosa ; "it is always the almost impossible thing which is true. That 'he has such excellent taste,' was much too hearty to have any heartburning under it. She knows nothing, and by the time she finds out what has happened, she won't care a straw."

It really seemed as if Lady Rosa had put on a full-dress temper with her ruby velvet gown—for of that colour and fabric was the costume she had selected for wear on a

blazing day in the beginning of August—so meek and mild was she under the influence of a secret relief.

It was allowed by the uninvited spectators in the ugly church, by the crowd of idlers about the entrance—in luck to have so fine a day for that favourite gratis public entertainment, a wedding—and also by the guests, that Miss Chumleigh's wedding was a very pretty one, and that Miss Chumleigh was a very pretty bride. Nobody could see much of her, to be sure ; but her veil was splendid, and the dark hair and dark eyes did show a little under it ; and then she carried herself so well, and her manner was perfect.

As on most occasions of the sort, there was comparatively little mention made of the bridegroom. To the external crowd he was an accidental accompaniment of the occasion ; and those inside noticed only that he was rather tall, and that his clothes were well cut. A bridegroom's natural insignificance attended Mr. Thornton ; the usual importance with which for one day in her life the least beautiful, equally with the most beautiful, of girls is invested, attached to Laura Chumleigh. The wedding-guests were well selected among the most eligible of Lady Rosa's acquaintance, and everything was quite as it ought to be.

A general imputation of thorough worldliness to a large gathering of people is apt to be as rash as it is in its essence uncharitable ; but there certainly were not many of the persons present at Laura's wedding and the feast which followed it, who took into consideration, in the motive of their congratulations, what manner of man he was to whom the brilliant girl had just confided herself for life. People in general knew very little about him, except the notorious fact of his wealth, and that the marriage had been arranged after a short acquaintance. Mr. Thornton, who was not in any set, was a nobody in the sense of the cliques and coteries of society. With his fortune, however, and her own looks and good connections on the mother's side, Mrs. Thornton might do anything she pleased, short of

penetrating the absolutely inner circles, especially as she would, of course, keep as clear as possible of that dreadful Lady Rosa. Laura's mother had been useful to her as a Ness; but as an individual she could only hinder her daughter's success in the novel position in which she might take a line of her own.

A man who does not belong to a set, and who is said to know nobody, by the persons who entertain a conviction that they and their associates compose the everybody to know whom must naturally be the ambition of all well-constituted minds, might fairly be supposed to feel more embarrassment at his own wedding than even the ordinary bridegroom. There was not, however, the least embarrassment in the looks or the demeanour of Mr. Thornton. He was, on the contrary, a man with whom even a casual observer would instinctively associate the ideas of self-possession and self-respect—a man who could never be, or be made to look, ridiculous. He was well-built, dark-haired, gray-eyed, about thirty years old, with a remarkably keen and steady way of looking at the person whom he addressed in an accent which had the strength and character of the North in it, without its roughness. His figure had lissomeness, strength, and ease entirely unlike the ease of the classes who have been called "clothes-wearing," in default of a more accurate definition of "the grand air," as it is in this day of travestie. The beautiful little figure at his side did not look at all out of place there; and his glance fell upon Laura's sparkling countenance as she received the compliments of the company, with an expression of devotion and of deep content, which made his face almost as striking, in its way, as her own.

The wedding-breakfast was a bore to the chief performers in the social drama. Colonel Chumleigh was so dismally depressed that not even the significantly-bent brows of Lady Rosa could induce him to assume the virtue of sociability. Lady Rosa, who, although she did frown at

the Colonel, was much less militant and dictatorial than usual, was visited by occasional fits of absence of mind, to which the ecclesiastical dignitary who sat beside her submitted with resignation, largely assisted by the savoury meats his soul loved. He was, however, a little shocked when Lady Rosa so far forgot herself and him as to interrupt him in a lengthy description of a visit to a pretty place in Suffolk, from whence he had returned only the preceding day.

"On an interesting occasion also," his lordship explained; "my nephew was the happy man—Harry Trevor, I think he has the honour of being known to you."

"Yes," asserted Lady Rosa, "I saw the marriage in the *Post*. I hope it is all you can wish."

"Well, well," said the Bishop, raising a fat, white hand in deprecation of the unreasonableness of such a hope; "not quite all, perhaps, but there are many advantages, many advantages, and all we can wish is not to be had here below. There is not much fortune, not much fortune; her brother is Vicar of Wold, and an old friend of mine. The wedding did not go off with all the delightful smoothness of this occasion"—here the Bishop smiled and bowed with a similar delightful smoothness—"for, just as everybody was sitting down to breakfast, poor Mr. Cathcart was sent for in all haste to attend a death-bed."

"Indeed," said Lady Rosa listlessly "Could not he have sent his curate?"

"Well, no; not exactly, not exactly, on that occasion. It was not an ordinary occasion; not an every-day summons. The dying person was the principal individual in Cathcart's parish; in fact, the proprietor of Bevis——"

"Wonderful roses are they not, so late in the season?" said Lady Rosa, drawing a flower-stand towards her with a jerk, and disturbing alike the symmetry of the table and the equanimity of the Bishop. "They come from Hertfordshire, and I don't think there are any roses like them. How difficult it is to get the old cabbage-rose now! It has

become so rare that one is almost surprised it has not come into fashion ; and, after all, there is nothing like it."

Lady Rosa ran on through half-a-dozen more sentences, all about roses, lovely products of nature to which the Bishop was as indifferent as she was, with an appearance of vehement interest in her theme, which attracted Laura's attention. She wondered whether Lady Rosa was scolding the Bishop. His lordship sniffed at the flower-stand which Lady Rosa had pulled into inconvenient contact with his plate, but made no comment upon her outburst of enthusiasm, except a mental one.

"I have been told," said his lordship to himself, "that Lady Rosa Chumleigh has the reputation of being the rudest woman in England ; and now I perceive that she deserves it."

The crowd in the street had fluctuated as to its numbers during the festive proceedings inside the house, and had been additionally enlivened by a German band, Punch, and a boneless boy, who performed horrid antics on a piece of baize about the size of an Arab's prayer-carpet. It received a large accession to its strength when the balcony, turned into a tent for the occasion, began to fill with the wedding guests, and a rumour spread that the happy pair were coming out.

Laura retired, accompanied only by Julia Carmichael, "the working bridesmaid," as she called herself, leaving the other three ornamental young ladies to amuse themselves in the balcony tent, and the important ceremony of changing the wedding-dress was performed. The bride was giving some final directions to Julia about one of those little packets which had come in so conveniently as an excuse on the previous night, when Lady Rosa made her appearance, and was asked by Laura the most disconcerting question that could have been put to her :

"Mamma," said Mrs. Thornton, "can you tell Julia where to find yesterday's *Morning Post?*"

"Yesterday's *Morning Post*," repeated Lady Rosa, with a very black-looking frown; "what can you want with it just now?"

"Only to see where Florence Daubeney has gone to, mamma. Her aunt and Sir John have left town; I knew she was going with them, and Julia saw their names among the departures yesterday, but she did not notice where they had gone to. I thought you might have the paper, as you took it out of this room."

"I know nothing about it."

"Never mind; Julia will find it somewhere about when all this fuss is over." Then Laura added, with a sweet smile: "I want you to tell me that I looked nice in the white gown, after all, mamma. Everybody else said so, but I do want a little bit of praise from you."

"You looked better than you ever looked in your life," said Lady Rosa, with a sudden softening of her voice and face, which brought tears to the bride's bright eyes. It had been a most unsentimental wedding.

"I wonder I ever dared to say it," Laura added, when she told her husband how she had extracted a compliment from her mother; "I suppose it was the newborn courage of my emancipation, and I was trying my wings."

The long day had come to a close, and the house in Lowndes Street was restored to its usual dingy orderliness. The Colonel was tired, sad, and silent. Lady Rosa was tired, excited, and cross. Julia Carmichael was tired, but methodical and conscientious, as it was her wont to be. The faithful and slightly obstinate cousin resolved to execute every commission which Laura had given her before she would consider her day's work at an end. One of those commissions involved the finding of *The Morning Post* of the previous day, and Julia set about looking for it in a methodical way, which meant not giving in until she had found it.

After a vain search in the lower rooms, and some

fruitless questioning of the servants, Julia bethought herself of asking the Colonel whether he knew anything of the missing newspaper. With this purpose she went upstairs and knocked at the door of his dressing-room. No answer was returned, and Julia, thinking she must have been mistaken in supposing that her uncle was there, entered the room. It was unoccupied, and the door of communication with Lady Rosa's room stood open, a screen being drawn partly across it. As Julia crossed the room she could see, beyond the edge of the screen, Colonel Chumleigh seated at his wife's writing-table; a newspaper, in which her quick eye recognised *The Morning Post,* was spread upon the table, while on the far side stood Lady Rosa, bending forward, with a long, spiky forefinger planted on a certain spot in the paper. As Julia paused, uncertain whether to advance or retreat, Lady Rosa tapped the paper emphatically, and said in a voice which banished Julia's hesitation:

"I suppose you think this business was not hard to manage! Do you imagine everything would have gone off so well, if I had allowed Laura to see that?"

CHAPTER III.

JULIA CARMICHAEL.

THE impression that Julia Carmichael made upon strangers in most cases was, that she was not very interesting; and that it was amiable of her cousin, Laura Chumleigh, to be so fond of her. Perhaps this, or, at least, the first portion of it, was not so superficial as most judgments that are hastily formed and thoughtlessly expressed, for Julia was not a striking person. She was Colonel Chumleigh's niece, the only and orphan child of his only sister, and both her

parents had been dead for a longer period than her memory extended to.

She had been left to the guardianship of her uncle when she was five years old, and was admitted by Lady Rosa Chumleigh to her own nursery until she reached the age of ten. Then she was sent, fortunately for her, as it turned out, to a boarding-school, which was not too expensive to allow of the charges being paid out of the provision that her parents, who had both died in India, had been able to make for their only child.

Lady Rosa would not have thought of sending Laura to a boarding-school, no such levelling proceeding could have been tolerated in the case of a Ness, but little Julia Carmichael's was quite another case. No one could say how things might go with her in the future, and she must not be brought up with any ridiculous notions of equality with her cousin. She certainly did not entertain any such notions, though it was probably only in the eyes of Lady Rosa Chumleigh that they would have seemed ridiculous, and the boarding-school experiment was successful. Julia Carmichael acquired everything that was taught her, and a great deal that was not; discernment of character, for instance, and tact; a tolerably just estimate of the difference between reality and make-believe; and a reasonably correct notion of what might be got out of life in the way of contentment, and of what it was totally useless to look for, or expect, as a product or accompaniment of life.

The boarding-school selected by Lady Rosa Chumleigh as a safe place of deposit for her husband's niece, was an old-established one, with quite a county reputation, situated within a short distance of a large and important town in Suffolk. Julia was the youngest pupil the Misses Sandilands had ever received, and she had the good fortune to find favour in the eyes of the highly-respected maiden ladies who presided over Bury House. Her lot was in

reality preferable to that of the cousin Laura, of whom she told her companions wondrous tales when she returned from the one annual visit to her uncle's house in Hertfordshire which Lady Rosa allowed her, but Laura supplied the fanciful element in the girl's life that could not be altogether dispensed with. She was far better informed, better brought up, better fitted to face the world than her beautiful cousin, and she had a truer notion of that world which would have to be faced.

Julia was little more than a child when it occurred to her, during one of her visits to her relatives, to wonder how it had ever happened that her uncle and Lady Rosa had become man and wife.

"Nobody can make *a man* do anything if he does not like," the small observer said to herself on that occasion, "and it seems to me that Uncle Chumleigh could not have liked to marry Lady Rosa; she is so ugly, and she does scold so. At all events, I am quite sure he would not like to marry her now."

She continued to meditate a good deal on this theme, and as her opportunities for observing how the institution of matrimony worked were very limited, she allowed her observation of it, in the character of a failure in this particular instance, to influence her general views to an extent which, as their data were not explained, considerably astonished her companions. A school-girl who had no ardent desire to leave school, and was inclined to think one would be better off unmarried than married, was a phenomenon, indeed, and Julia's heretical notions tended to render her unpopular. As she grew older she began to understand the respective characters of her uncle and Lady Rosa better, and to suspect that if there did exist in the world a man who could be made to do what he did not like, her uncle was that man. From this new light on the subject, to regarding the Colonel as the victim of Lady Rosa's superior strength of purpose, and Lady Rosa as

having married him, was not a long step for a reasoner like Julia.

She liked her uncle very much, but she always wondered why he had chosen "the service" for his profession, and how he had acquitted himself in a position of command. These were points on which Julia's shrewdness and observation availed her nothing; she had no side-lights by which to learn that Colonel Chumleigh was an exceedingly brave man, and had been a first-rate officer. He did not retire from the service until some years after his niece had been confided to his guardianship, but of those years Julia knew nothing. The Chumleighs were in India when Captain Carmichael and his wife died within a few hours of each other, and Lady Rosa brought the Colonel's ward to England with her own little girl, who was one year older than Julia.

Lady Rosa did not rejoin her husband; and when he brought his regiment home, at the expiration of the usual term of service, in such good condition that the Colonel was highly commended in the proper and honour-giving quarters, circumstances had arisen which decided him to retire. A childless uncle of Lady Rosa's, the only one of her relatives who had not regarded her love-match with disdain, and held that she, for her folly in marrying a nobody with next to nothing, and the Colonel for his presumption in marrying a Ness, would be properly punished by lifelong poverty, and then promptly forgotten all about them, died while Colonel Chumleigh was on his voyage home, and left a small estate to Lady Rosa.

Colonel Chumleigh had no very distinct notions of how to turn himself into a country gentleman; he rather thought he should dislike land; he was quite sure he should dislike the care and trouble of it. Lady Rosa did mind whether he liked or did not like the place; she was delighted. All the territorial instincts of a Ness awoke within her, and if the Scottish mountains, moors, lochs,

and deer-forests, which constituted the domains of that ancient house, had come into her possession, instead of a trim, pretty little place in the best-wooded part of a tame and prosperous English county, she could hardly have been prouder, busier, or more dictatorial.

The Colonel might have spared himself all misgivings as to the trouble and responsibility that were likely to accompany the proprietorship of Hunsford. Lady Rosa had not the smallest intention of permitting them to devolve upon him. She had never hitherto in her life had enough to do, and although she had in her some of the unwomanly meanness which would distinguish between what was her own and what was the joint property of her husband and herself, this motive did not count for so much in her proceedings as did the previously-repressed activity and the self-sufficiency of her disposition. She had hated India and "the service." The methods and ways of the one had been too strong for her; she had been obliged to submit to them; and there was no room for her energies in connection with the other.

Perhaps the only affectation of which Lady Rosa Chumleigh ever was guilty, was that of making intentional blunders about military matters—misapplying technical terms, and qualifying all conversation, in which they were correctly used, as "Army slang." She would have hailed with delight almost any turn of the wheel of fortune that would have led to her husband's leaving the service—but such a turn as this! She was little given to gratitude, or to thinking that her merits had met with a sufficient recognition by Providence; but she certainly did bless the memory of the donor of Hunsford.

Colonel Chumleigh retired, and entered upon an existence of chronic not-knowing what to do with himself. He had never known much about the country in England, and he could not interest himself sufficiently in the subject to learn. The garden, and the shrubberies, and the ferns

were all very well; but he found the gardens, shrubberies, and ferns belonging to other people of about as much or as little interest to him. The place was too small for sporting purposes. Indeed, the Colonel, who had been a noted "shikari," could not be bothered with anything but "big game." He liked men's dinner-parties, of the military order, where they told heavy regimental stories, and everybody remembered the respective dates of everybody else's "steps."

But there was not much of that sort of thing to be had in Hertfordshire. The fact was that the Colonel had not a talent for pottering, and there was nothing else for him to do. The first-rate potterer, whose lines are laid in pleasant places where no pressing duties contend with this practice of his art, is a happy man; the third-rate, or perfunctory, potterer is bored and a bore.

Colonel Chumleigh never rose to eminence as a potterer, and he felt his deficiency very much, until he took to occupying himself pretty constantly with his little daughter, Laura; and from that time things went better with him. The bright little girl was not an only child. "Providentially," Lady Rosa would say as if she were talking of the succession to Chatsworth, "providentially there is a male heir to Hunsford." During the first years of her proprietorship Lady Rosa had been much disturbed by the apprehension that the place would have "to go in the female line;" but the birth of a son removed that source of discontent.

It was no wonder that Julia Carmichael should have asked herself on one of her annual visits to Hunsford, how it was that her uncle could ever have married Lady Rosa, for a pair less fitly framed to meet by nature it is rare to see. And yet theirs had been a love-match; and distinguished by that abdication of judgment in favour of sentiment, which is commonly so called. What had become of the love? Ay, there was the rub, from which so

many suffer throughout long lives. Lady Rosa was a practical person, not troubled with niceties of feeling; so, when the time came at which it was desirable to make sure that there should be as little "nonsense" about her daughter as there was about herself, she did not scruple to use her own case for the illustration of her text, and the enforcement of her doctrine.

It was a pleasant surprise to the Colonel when Lady Rosa decidedly took to Julia Carmichael. She had permitted her presence, indeed, at stated periods since they had been living at Hunsford, but she had never taken much notice of her. Toleration was a great deal to get from Lady Rosa, as Julia had the good sense to recognise at an early period; and she was so happy with her cousin, for whom she entertained unbounded admiration and affection, she had so rightly profited by the discipline of a school at which, though she was contented she was not spoiled, that she found no difficulty in making the best of her position with her uncle's wife.

With the prospect of Laura's introduction into society, a new era of activity for Lady Rosa—and of disturbance, but with certain alleviations, for the Colonel—had set in. In the interests of "the heir to Hunsford," who was to be sent to a public school, and to a university, and to have every advantage, and who was the only being his mother really loved, it was most desirable that Laura should marry well; while in Laura's own interests this was indispensable. A furnished house in Lowndes Street was taken, Laura was presented to the Queen, received some lukewarm recognition from sundry branches of the noble house of Ness, was much admired by many greater people, went the customary round of the season, and returned, on its conclusion, to Hunsford, a good deal the worse for it in point of bloom and spirits; and with no prospect of marrying well, for that year, at all events.

The Colonel had found pottering easier work in town

than in the country. He was not of much greater importance in one place than in the other, but he found out men whom he knew in London; and then there was the club, and he liked to go to places with Laura, and to see her dance and enjoy herself. How wonderfully pretty his little girl had become! A short time before she had been only a dark-eyed, olive-skinned, foreign-looking little creature, full of pretty coaxing ways with him—ways that neither her mother nor her governess knew anything about—and now she was a lovely, brilliant young woman, holding her own in the big world, and going in for its prizes; fluttering in the sunshine like the bright insect by whose name her father called her. Before that first season came quite to a close, however, something ailed his Firefly. She paled and drooped, and did not seem to care at all about the final festivities; but still less did she seem to care about going back to Hunsford. The Colonel, taking courage where Laura was concerned, inquired of her mother what was the matter. Only a piece of folly, Lady Rosa answered him; the usual nonsense that all girls had a fit of, she supposed, once in their lives; fancying themselves in love with men whom it was impossible they could marry, unless they were permitted to make themselves and every one connected with them miserable and ridiculous. The whole thing had been happily discovered and disposed of, before it was too late; and she must really beg that the Colonel would not meddle in the matter, or allow Laura to perceive that he was aware of her nonsense.

Colonel Chumleigh was greatly disturbed by all this; he had secretly cherished a hope that his daughter might find in marriage the happiness he had missed, but which he had not ceased to believe in, or to hold to be inseparably dependent upon love. He could not, even yet, imitate Lady Rosa's matter-of-fact, and calmly dispose of love's young dream as "nonsense." Nevertheless, when he heard such of the particulars of his daughter's "nonsense" as

Lady Rosa thought proper to impart to him, he had to acknowledge that it would not have "done" at all. There was not even so much reason in this case as there had been in his own, and Lady Rosa herself could hardly feel the force of that comparison more strongly than the now middle-aged hero of her own love's young dream felt it.

Julia Carmichael came to Hunsford upon her annual visit immediately on the return of the family from London. Laura had been peremptorily ordered by her mother to refrain from any confidences with her cousin on the subject of the "nonsense" that had occurred in town, and she had scrupulously obeyed, being, indeed, disinclined to speak of the matter herself; still the companionship did her good, and Julia became an element of harmony and relief in the household. When the visit was approaching its conclusion, Lady Rosa informed Julia that she had changed her plans concerning her. The Colonel's niece—for whom no formal introduction into the world would be necessary, and who would be useful at Hunsford when Laura should have married well—was to have left school at the following midsummer term; but Lady Rosa now decreed that the period should be abridged. That Julia was to come home at Christmas.

In her unusually urbane mood towards the girl—a mood which was much assisted by her vexation with Laura—Lady Rosa found time to bestow some thought upon her future. She was not pretty, and she would have no more money than would barely suffice for her to live upon, according to the properly moderate notions of persons of her class—the smaller gentry—it was not therefore probable that she would have a chance of marriage, unless she had some one to manage a little for her. If Julia should conduct herself to Lady Rosa's satisfaction, it was just possible that Lady Rosa might do the necessary management. She did not pledge herself, to herself, to anything. Time would show, and she should see.

Julia Carmichael came to Hunsford for good at Christmas-time, and even if Lady Rosa had been a jealous mother, she could not have entertained any fear of Julia's interfering with her brilliant cousin. Miss Carmichael was tall of stature, deliberate of speech, methodical in all her ways, so self-possessed that not even Lady Rosa could disconcert her; and although there was a certain attraction about her face, in the intelligent gray eyes, smooth, almost colourless complexion, well-shaped forehead, and sweet expression, that attraction was the opposite of the charm which Laura exercised.

In the following spring the same house in Lowndes Street was again secured for the Chumleighs, and Laura, in renovated health, beauty, and spirits, began her second season. Of the gaieties of this year Julia had her share, according to Lady Rosa's notions of what was the right thing for her; and she was perfectly satisfied. She gave no trouble, she made no fuss, she really was an admirable girl, and Lady Rosa would lend her best assistance to the disposing of her when Laura was settled. The second season came to an end; the family returned to Hunsford; and, shortly afterwards, Julia Carmichael went on a long visit to her old friends at Bury House.

When Julia returned to Hunsford she was received with the usual warmth of welcome by Laura and her uncle, and with more than usual civility by Lady Rosa. "I am glad to see you, my dear," said her ladyship, "if it were only that you can say more than 'yes' and 'no' when you are spoken to." The conference between the cousins that evening was a long one, for Julia had an important piece of news to confide to Laura. Lady Rosa's well-meant prevision for the future was unnecessary; Julia had disposed of herself without anybody's assistance.

"Engaged! You don't really mean it, Julia?"

"Indeed, I do mean it. Actually and seriously engaged."

"And papa and mamma not to know about it! And that with Miss Sandilands' sanction! Does it seem all right?"

"I think it does, and so will you when I have explained. It is to be what your mother hates and despises—a love-match."

"Ah, poor mamma!" said Laura, with a sigh.

The story Julia had to tell was briefly this: The Misses Sandilands had a nephew, the son of their dead brother, a clever, energetic young man, and this John Sandilands was the hero of Julia's romance.

"He is as well-born as I am, and no better; and he has very little money, but plenty of ability and courage, and he is willing to work as hard as he can, and to wait as long as he must, for me. His aunts were rather shocked at first when he told them, and that was before he told me, because I was under their protection—so right and honourable of him, was it not?—but they came all right afterwards, and were so nice; and they both said they were sure there could be no happiness in the world like a real love-match, though neither of themselves had ever had time to be in love with any one. That did sound melancholy, and when we talked about it afterwards—he and I, I mean—he said it made him ashamed of himself, for a great deal of what they had earned had been expended on him—not that he was in fault for that. And then everything was settled between us. John has got a very good offer to go out to Ceylon to manage a coffee-plantation, which has been let to go almost to ruin, for a friend of his, Sir Wilfred Esdaile—do you know him?" Laura had looked up, with a slight start, at the mention of the name; but she only shook her head, and Julia went on:

"He's to have a certain salary for the first year, and then it is to be raised, according to 'results,' he said; and when it reaches one thousand pounds a year, he is to write and tell my uncle, and then he is to come home for me,

and we are to be married, and to go out to Ceylon and live in a bungalow."

"And you have promised him that you will wait, you do not know how long?"

"And I have promised him that I will wait, I do not know how long. You see, dear Laura, he and I both know our own minds perfectly; nothing can ever change them: and if there were any opposition here it would only make things uncomfortable—it is not as if I were their daughter, you know—but nothing that the Colonel or Lady Rosa could say would have the least effect on me. It ought not, you know, for John and I love and trust each other; the only reasons that could be urged against us would be worldly reasons, and those we have weighed and put aside. I shall be all I can to my uncle and Lady Rosa, and when the time comes they will see that I have done right, holding to my promise, but not troubling their house with useless discussions."

"Nothing—no waiting—could make you give him up?" Laura asked, anxiously, and with a look of pain in her dark eyes.

"Not for all the world—and yet, what a silly measure that is to mete my assurance by—for what would all the world be to me without him?"

"It's a strange secret to have to keep," said Laura, after a pause, and thoughtfully, "and yet I'm very glad you have told me."

"I could not have helped that; in the first place, because we are too near and too much to each other for reserves; and then again, because I must talk of him to you. Think how far away he is, and for how long!"

The cousins talked much over this wonderful subject, and it was constantly renewed between them. John Sandilands was hard-working and prosperous, and by the time in the following year that Laura at length realised her mother's wishes, and married "well," he was beginning to see a term to his long engagement.

The Indian mail that went out two days after the marriage of Mr. Thornton and Miss Chumleigh, carried a description of the wedding, written by Julia Carmichael to John Sandilands.

CHAPTER IV

"IT FELL UPON A DAY."

ROBERT THORNTON was not in his own person a member of the "self-made" class who, however estimable and admirable, are not, as a rule, agreeable, especially to the hereditary drones of society; but he was only once removed from that condition. The inevitable half-crown had founded the fortunes of his father, into whose origin he had never inquired; of whose character and career he was justly proud; but he could not recall any epoch in his own life at which money and all it procures had not been at his command. The self-making man had fallen upon golden days in the beginning, upon the piping times of sound speculations, and large undertakings reasonably guaranteed by political and social stability in Europe, and things had prospered with him from his first lucky hit, throughout a career which had been as honourable as it was successful.

The self-making process took time, and the eminent contractor and mine-owner did not consider himself well enough off to marry until he was a more than middle-aged man. Then he married a pretty and good girl, who was nobody in particular, and who lived just one year after their marriage. The self-made man had the usual ambition to found a family, and to leave an entailed estate; and now he was a widower with an only child. He survived the pretty and simple young wife—whom he loved much better than his success or his ambition, and to whom he never gave a successor—ten years; and during that time he added land to land with great perseverance, buying all he could get in the neighbourhood of his first purchase, in a dull district

of Dumfriesshire, but never residing on his estate. He could not have resided on it, indeed, for there was no house; and, although he was always intending to build one, and had plans for the projected mansion numerous enough to have formed a department of an art-exhibition all to themselves, they never got beyond being framed and glazed and hung upon the walls of the "office" in the old-fashioned house in Bedford Square, in which the self-made man had lived through all his best years, and in which he died. His will was a simple, but a stringent document.

Besides his son, he had but one relative, a sister, twenty years younger than himself, who had come to live in his house after the death of his wife, and had been charged with the bringing up of the child. To her he bequeathed the house in Bedford Square and all that it contained, with a sum of money sufficient to render her independent for her life; and to his son all his other possessions. The landed estate was tied up by the strictest entail, and a proviso was added to the dispositions of the will, that, should there unfortunately be a failure of heirs male, the husband of the female heir, on whom in that case the Mains would devolve, must bear the name of Thornton. This was the one harmless vanity of the self-made man. All the fitting and proper provisions as to trustees were duly made, and the will included a strong recommendation of the testator's only child to the gratefully acknowledged care of his sister, upon whom, in the untoward event of Robert's dying without heirs, the whole property would devolve.

The loneliness of Robert Thornton in the world, which held but one human being bound to him by any tie of blood, was the drawback to his otherwise prosperous lot; and the boy felt that loneliness, not only in his boyhood, but when the fair future of early manhood lay before him. A great deal of the simplicity of a social stratum, far below his present place in life, existed in Robert Thornton's dis-

position, tastes, and notions ; he felt himself at fault among the persons who had lots of people belonging to them, and complex lives and interests to occupy them. It was not that he could not amuse himself like other people, that he had any touch of eccentricity about him, or did not know that, in many respects, he was exceedingly fortunate ; but he was naturally sensitive and imaginative, and he was devoid of the cynical selfishness that can find a compensation for isolation in independence.

It would have been difficult for any young man of one-and-twenty to be more completely his own master than was Robert Thornton when he attained his majority, and he had plenty of friends to let him see how very much to be envied they considered him. The trustees had done their duty by his estate ; and although his fortune was not so large as it was said to be—there had been vicissitudes in the value of certain of its components—it was large for a man without the obligations of rank, and who had literally no claims upon him. His education had been carried out on the plan which his father would have approved, he was sent to one of the great public schools, but he declined to follow up that phase of education by university life, and adopted travel instead.

This was not orthodox, but it was effective ; he saw many parts of the world, learned much of its history, made some mistakes, but committed no base actions ; suffered a good deal from misplaced confidence, but did not clothe himself with cynicism and selfishness as with armour of proof, because the world did not turn out to be all he had expected. Robert Thornton distinguished himself among his fellows as a climber of mountains, never showed a trace of faculty for money-making, or of that interest in the process which had distinguished his father, and was regarded by the comparatively small section of society by whom he was discussed as "not a marrying man."

Robert Thornton was not so popular with women as are

many men who have his passably good looks, his pleasant manners, or his fortune. He was very courteous to women; he did not talk lightly of them or believe the statements of men who did so; but he did not flatter them, and he never seemed to experience the least reluctance or difficulty about absenting himself from their society. He would be seen at places where the world did congregate for a few weeks, would then disappear, and be next heard of from some mountain peak or hardly known "interior." This was not satisfactory, not all that might have been expected from a man who, though he was in some senses "nobody," might have created an interest in that negative circumstance itself, and who possessed at least two of the instruments by which he might have hoisted himself from being nobody into being somebody: wealth and independence.

He might have been interesting—if indeed he could have escaped being ridiculous—had it ever been suspected that he was romantic. Exploded as romance is, as an admitted element of modern life, a secret hankering after it, a feeling that one would like to be romantic if one only could, is not so uncommon as may be supposed. When Mr. Trollope depicts the mercenary and mendacious Lizzie Eustace indulging in visions of a possible Corsair, and hoping he may turn up among her acquaintance, he puts a *pli* of our complex social life with his usual pithy realism. Robert Thornton, however, was never suspected of being romantic; he kept his secret so well until the hour came for its disclosure that the general opinion concerning him was, that not only was he not a marrying man, but that, if he should ever change his mind on the subject, he would be very unlikely to do anything foolish. Doing something foolish, according to the people who discussed Robert Thornton, would mean his marrying for any other than the solid motive of interest. He was one of the rootless ones; no doubt he would try for great connections, and a wife with family influence.

It was probably this very fact of his rootlessness which kept up, as it had originated, the romance in Robert Thornton's nature. He was strangely alone in the world; but somewhere in the same world there existed the woman who was to be his fellow-soul; before the light, warmth, and sufficingness of whose presence the isolation of his life was to disappear. When they two should meet and recognise each other, then the music of life would begin to sound, and its sweet waters to flow; then its meaning would be made plain, and its worth proved; and all the questioning, the vagueness, the irresistible strange sadness, which even hard travel, and the commerce of men, and determined plunges into the interests, and the business, and the pleasures of life, were not able to banish completely, or for long, would vanish away. Into all these things Robert Thornton did plunge betimes; but he would emerge from them, and find himself on the dim shore again, with the old lonely sense of insufficiency stealing over him, and the consciousness that in the transient energy with which he went at those things there was only skilful make-believe after all.

Towards the end of the second season of Colonel and Lady Rosa Chumleigh's occupation of the house in Lowndes Street, Robert Thornton met Laura Chumleigh at a garden-party, and the make-believe of his life came to an end for evermore. He was the last man of whom such a thing would have been generally predicted; but any one who had found out the secret of his romantic disposition would have felt pretty sure that sooner or later he would fall in love at first sight, and such a penetrating person would probably have added, "and with the wrong woman." He had fallen in love at first sight, at a later date in his life than would have seemed likely; whether Laura was the wrong woman remains to be seen.

Robert Thornton fell in love with Laura after a fashion of which we say that it is very rare in these days, but perhaps the truth is that it was never otherwise than very

rare; just as true poets, great artists, perfectly beautiful women, men supremely noble, and souls altogether saintly, are very rare. It was a fashion which caused every lighter emotion, or fantasy of so-called love, which he had ever felt, to flutter back to his remembrance, that they might be regarded for an instant with incredulous contempt, and then be dismissed for ever to the realm of nothingness; it was a fashion which, while it might have found some relief in the loftiest and most ecstatic, in the humblest and most homage-full of all the strains of all the poets who have sung of the conqueror of gods and men, had its own language, impossible of utterance, and was incommunicable, like the sense and the certainty of life itself and of its endless duration.

It was not only that from the moment he had learned by heart through his eyes the loveliness of her face and the grace of her form, Laura was beautiful to him; she was beauty itself, all beauty, all delight, all excellence. He had found her at last; here, standing by the side of a shallow piece of ornamental water, in a highly artificial garden not an hour's drive from the heart of fashionable London, glancing at him over a bunch of dusky crimson roses which set off the colouring of her radiant face, and talking the nothings proper to the occasion with the peculiar vividness that belonged to her. Laura Chumleigh was, to this man, the realisation of an ideal, the fulfilment of a dream; and it changed, he could not have told how, or how soon, into a hope.

It seemed to the trustful nature of Robert Thornton that he could not be quite misled by his fate, altogether doomed to emptiness of life and the walking in a vain shadow; and that, as it would be so with him, if their meeting were to have no meaning other than the addition of an insignificant item to her list of acquaintances for the beautiful girl, who was a new revelation to him, their meeting must have a further significance. He was not a

vain man—this was not a suggestion of conceit—but the essential loneliness of his life had inclined him to fatalism, though he did not so define it to himself, and there was so strange a fulfilment of his ideal in this meeting that he accepted the good omen with a superstitious joy.

The story of a courtship could not be made interesting to those who have assisted at the wedding of the lovers, but it would not be fair to Laura Chumleigh that it should be supposed she gave nothing but dross in return for the pure gold of such a love as it seldom falls to the lot of a woman to win. She certainly did not fall in love with Robert Thornton, either at first sight or on further acquaintance. They met as frequently, during the brief remainder of the season, and in the autumn and winter, as Mr. Thornton's ingenuity, seconded by Lady Rosa Chumleigh's good-will, could contrive that they should meet, and Laura liked him very much indeed. A man more versed in the ways of women of Laura's world would have seen, in that frank liking, the sentiment least answering to the romantic and absorbing passion which filled Robert Thornton's heart; but love in his case did not lack the "humbleness" that is not often a modern attribute of it, and he was the least presumptuous of wooers.

It would have sounded to him not more wicked blasphemy than sorry foolishness had any one suggested that he, Robert Thornton, was an entirely eligible match for Miss Chumleigh, and that the young lady's parents were alive to the fact; but of course, when a man is so much of an original as to regard the girl who has captivated him less as a young lady than as a goddess or an angel, such a mode of regarding her obscures his sense of his own importance. He was most unfashionably slow about declaring himself, although he had been allowed to perceive from the first that there was no rival for him to fear; and when at length he did so, it was impossible for him to avoid the knowledge that the occasion was not to Laura all it was to

him. She accepted him very prettily, very graciously; but told him she did not mean to be known as an engaged girl so early in the season, with such ease and frankness that he was disconcerted, and unequal to any protest.

Lady Rosa Chumleigh behaved very well on the occasion; she was a little afraid that Laura might not prove quite tractable, although she had acknowledged that she liked Robert Thornton sufficiently to get on very well with him, and although it was an understood thing that, her one chance of marrying for love having been lost, the matter was put entirely out of consideration. Still Lady Rosa expected Laura to recoil a little from the step which nevertheless she was prepared to take when the time should come; and Laura did recoil. She meant to marry Robert Thornton, but she would not marry him immediately; she liked him ever so much better as a friend than as a declared lover. She must have the rest of the season "to get over it."

Deep and dire was the vexation of Lady Rosa, but she did not always allow her temper to conquer her prudence, and she gave the victory to the latter on this occasion.

"And then, mamma," said Laura, taking courage from this, with the quick observation of the oppressed, "there's another thing. Mr. Thornton is very good to me, much better than I deserve; and he is very fond of me"—there was not the slightest bashfulness in the girl's tone; there was perhaps a little sorrowfulness, but she was as unembarrassed as if she had been speaking of some one else's lover —"dreadfully fond of me, I am afraid, if deep feelings make people unhappy; and he is the truthfullest person I ever knew. I really cannot let him be under any mistake; I must tell him——"

"What, pray?" Lady Rosa let her temper have its way now. "That absurd nonsense of two years ago, I suppose! You will do nothing of the sort, if you please. It is not usual, I believe, for girls to boast of their rejected lovers."

"Mamma, mamma! you know it was not that!"

"I know that a man asked you to marry him, and you did not do so; the reason is nobody's business. And you would make it a point of honour to talk about the matter to another man whom you mean to marry! I never heard of anything so unladylike in my life! Not another word, if you please!" Lady Rosa raised her bony hand in stern interdiction of the remonstrance that was on Laura's lips. "I distinctly forbid you to allude to the subject to Mr. Thornton or to anybody else, including myself."

Lady Rosa was far from having a true appreciation of Robert Thornton, but she was a keen observer where it was for her interest to be well informed, and she had discerned in her daughter's suitor depth and concentration of feeling which would be very likely, she thought, to lead to his taking that information which the girl on whom he had set his strong and tender heart had intended to impart to him, badly. She knew Laura would not venture to disobey the emphatic injunction she had laid upon her.

But, after all, this was only one danger provided against; who could tell when others might arise in a troublesome, one-sided business like this? If the stupid girl could only care a little more for the man who so eminently deserved the love he coveted so greedily!

It has been seen that Lady Rosa Chumleigh had reason to be better satisfied with her daughter's feelings towards Robert Thornton before the arrival of that blissful day which, as she put it to herself, got Laura off her mind.

The bride's letters home were not numerous and not long, but her unofficial communications to Julia Carmichael were considerably more expansive than those addressed to Lady Rosa.

Three weeks after their marriage, Mr. and Mrs. Thornton, who were going to the Mediterranean in their yacht in September, arrived at Dumfries, with the double purpose of seeing the Mains and visiting Robert Thornton's only

relative. The sister of the self-made man had retired from the uncongenial atmosphere of London life shortly after his death, having sold his house in Bedford Square, and she had since been living in comfort of the kind she appreciated, in a gray-granite-fronted abode, with a small garden and a little plantation of Scotch firs at the back of it, at a short distance from the town of Dumfries. The years had treated Dorcas Thornton very gently; her life had been singularly untroubled ever since the old time of that unforgotten great sorrow, her brother's death, and her pride in her nephew had never received a check.

"Do you remember," wrote Mrs. Thornton to her cousin Julia, "the delightful description in 'Marriage' of Lady Juliana Douglas's visit to her husband's Highland home—and of Miss Nicky, Miss Grizzy, and Miss Jacky? I think I am a little disappointed that nothing in my own adventures on my first visit to Scotland bears any resemblance to the experience of poor Harry Douglas's 'adored Julia,' that Dumfries is not in the Highlands, and Mr. Thornton's aunt is not in the least like any one of the spinsters of Glenfern. The town is dull, but the surrounding country, though they call it very tame here, is delightfully strange to my eyes, accustomed only to London and Hunsford.

"Yesterday we visited the Mains, and I was consulted about the site of the house that is to be built; the works are to be set on foot almost immediately. I found it difficult to form an opinion, because I know nothing about aspects, and points of view, and the other things that require to be considered, and so I answered pretty much at random. One thing I am sure of; that is, that I shall never care much to live in any house here for long at a time; it must be very dull.

"You will like to know about Miss Thornton. She is like a picture, and almost as quiet as one. She thinks her nephew the most perfect of human beings, and she

provoked him to the nearest approach to anger I have seen by letting me perceive that she does not particularly admire me, and that she thinks I can never be sufficiently grateful for the good fortune that has befallen me. Nobody, I suppose, likes to have their gratitude prescribed to them, and I generally turn a deaf ear to the broad hints which Miss Thornton gives me in this sense; but otherwise there is nothing whatever to complain of.

"The house is wonderfully prim, neat, and squarely set forth; the 'plenishing,' as they call furniture in Scotland, is all much older than Mr. Thornton, and most of it he remembers since he was a child. The old lady constantly informs me that she is merely a steward of these fine things—she regards them with the greatest reverence—and that when she is gone they will be his. Mr. Thornton would not be unlikely, I imagine, to keep all the dark mahogany, and the drab damask, and the thick glass as relics; and it is to be hoped the new house on the Mains will have plenty of lumber rooms. It seems the Thorntons originally came from this neighbourhood, and she returned to the old place and the old associations after the death of Mr. Thornton's father. She is a very nice old lady, but so totally unlike anybody we know in her ideas and ways that I am sure I could not make you realise her in the least. But oh! she has such a charming neighbour—a young widow—who lives in a gem of a little cottage close by the Stone House. Her husband was lost at sea, and she never recovered the shock of his death.

"Mrs. Monro—that is her name, Janet Monro; I like it so much—is quite young, not twenty-five, and very handsome, in a large, calm style. She has only one pleasure in life—her flower-garden, and as I do know something about flowers, we got on from the first. She was at the Stone House when we arrived, and she has been a perfect treasure to me, telling me what are the proper things for me to be interested in, and the queer Scotch

names for everything, which you must learn if you want to understand what the servants and people say. I do so wish we could persuade her to come with us on our cruise; I am sure the Mediterranean would be better for her than Scotland, and, as I cannot have you with me, I should like to have her. She knows your Misses Sandilands, but she never met you; she says you probably knew her husband's sister, whose name was, like her own, Janet Monro; she was at school at Bury House for some time. Do you remember any girl of that name? It was a good many years ago. We shall be in London on the 25th, and Mr. Thornton will take me down to Hunsford for a couple of days before we start. The yacht will be all ready by the 25th; we shall go to Southampton a little later. Tell papa Mr. Thornton has called the yacht the *Firefly*."

Julia Carmichael was not quite pleased with her cousin's letters; there was not exactly anything to complain of in them, but they were not the sort of letters that she herself would write if her long engagement with John Sandilands had just come to a happy termination. There was too little about Mr. Thornton, and too much about other people, to please Julia. But, she reflected, she must not make herself a rule for others, and Laura never had any sentimental ways about her. She did not answer the letter just quoted for several days, and in her reply she said: "I mentioned your new acquaintance in writing to Miss Sandilands, and asked about her sister-in-law and namesake. I remember Janet Monro at Bury House a long time ago; she went away as companion to a Mrs. Drummond, of Bevis, also in Suffolk."

Mrs. Thornton received her cousin's letter as she was leaving Dumfries, and read it in the train.

"Nothing wrong, dearest, is there?" asked Robert Thornton, attentive as usual to every look in her face.

"Nothing at all," she answered; and then she tore the letter into small pieces, and held them out of the carriage window, to be carried away by the wind.

CHAPTER V

IN THE GARDEN OF THE WORLD.

WHETHER the port of Ceylon be reached in going out or coming home, it is always welcome to the traveller. It means the end of a long stage in the journey, either way, and a beautiful country to be seen, which cannot but delight the more accustomed, while it enchants the fresh imagination, eager for impressions.

To the magical beauty and the mystic interest of the island of gems, flowers, and fables, a young man who was approaching Point de Galle on board a steamer homeward bound from Calcutta, on a brilliant autumn day, was more than indifferent. He was not well enough to care about the "wine-dark sea," or the sight of Adam's Peak, a purple mass upon the sky, or to respond to the enthusiasm of a fellow-traveller—a pretty girl, too—who had insisted on quoting descriptive bits about Ceylon from favourite authors, as they neared "that small bay, surrounded with lofty cocoa-palms, whose dull green becomes a dazzling emerald in the damp hot air," which forms the harbour of Point de Galle. Miss Ainslie, the solemn civilian her papa, with the fretful, faded, hard-to-please lady her mother, who viewed the interesting young officer going home on sick-leave with decided disfavour, and regarded all books and quotations from them as "stuff," had bored him occasionally during their voyage; but they were going "on," while he meant to wait for a Messageries ship from Colombo, and go "home" by the French line. "Home" had not, in fact, any very particular meaning for Edward Dunstan, and he had taken his sick-leave from the regiment he had joined only two years previously in India, with reluctance. The doctors had sent him home after two attacks of fever, but they had not told him he must not linger by the way, and he had learned by letters which reached him during his second bout of fever, that by the time he should reach Galle a friend of his would have come out to Ceylon. Captain Dunstan meant

therefore to remain for awhile, go up to Kandy, see the beautiful hill-country, and get home soon enough for all his purposes.

The passengers on board the homeward steamer were few, and the Ainslies were the most important persons among them. Captain Dunstan was a good-natured young man enough when he was not ill and out of spirits, but he hated to be regarded as an interesting invalid, and in that light the Ainslies, father and daughter, somewhat too persistently regarded him. Mrs. Ainslie did not think him at all interesting; in fact, Mrs. Ainslie considered no one's invalidism interesting except her own. Mr. Ainslie was going home, after a prosperous civil career in India, to reside on an estate which he had employed an agent to purchase for him, and as good luck would have it, he had fallen in with a man who could tell him all about it. As he was a slow-minded person, much given to entertaining only one idea at a time, and to harping upon that, Mr. Ainslie made Edward Dunstan regret, before they had been very long on speaking terms, that he had so freely admitted an intimate acquaintance with that part of Suffolk in which was situate a desirable property called the Chantry, whose qualities the happy purchaser set forth in florid detail.

Mr. Ainslie was a solemn, sun-dried, brown little man, whose lines had been laid in pleasant places as regarded emolument and position. His successive appointments had been "pucka," but likewise dismal and monotonous, involving much authoritative settling of the affairs of the natives, and comparatively little intercourse with Europeans. It is not unnatural that experience of this kind, acting on a slow mind and a tendency to pomposity, should have induced Mr. Ainslie to entertain an exalted opinion of himself, and to hold the complacent belief that anything of interest to him must needs be of interest to well and rightly-constituted mankind; but persons who

were impetuous, and disinclined to try back for first causes when the result before them was a bore, found him none the easier to be put up with because he was "just what might be expected."

He had lived so many years in India, and in out-of-the-way districts, that he knew nothing about English life, and, indeed, not much about Indian life of that modern sort which has succeeded the "John Company" epoch; but the sun-dried little man had notions of his own. They formed an odd medley: cows grazing in real green grass fields, county-town market-days, morning walks in places where one might poke one's own land with one's own spud, and where the pig, so far from being an unclean, would be almost a sacred animal, preponderated among them.

"I should have preferred Berkshire, on account of the pigs," he said, plaintively, to Edward Dunstan; "but there was nothing to be had."

"Why, you don't suppose Berkshire pigs mope at home and never roam, but dwell as hermits alway, like Charles O'Malley," said Amabel. "You can import them, can't he, Captain Dunstan? Do tell him they import Berkshires at Bevis!"

"I can't tell him, Miss Ainslie," said Captain Dunstan, "because I don't know. I was not posted up on pigs at Bevis: they don't interest me in the plural."

"Of course, I understand; only when they are 'pig' and dangerous, and you stick them yourself. How shall you ever settle down to lawn-tennis?—that's the proper thing now, my old school friends tell me."

"I don't think I shall be called upon to try that mild alternative to 'shikar;' at least, not at Bevis, if indeed it prevails there."

"Not at Bevis! I thought, all this time, you were going home there."

"Did you? I am sure I never said so."

"Perhaps you did not; but, somehow, I took it for granted."

Amabel looked up at Edward Dunstan, who was staring at the sea in an absent manner, and felt slightly disconcerted. But she was not one to yield for a moment to such an unaccustomed sensation, and she turned it off with a laugh.

"Here we have been, I do believe, worrying you all this time under false pretences, thinking we were to be neighbours, as Bevis and the Chantry are to each other. I wonder why the place was called the Chantry?"

"Because there never was a church, or a chantry, or a monk within three miles of it, and the people who gave it that name had not the remotest notion of what it meant."

"Very likely. Here comes mamma, with a shawl on that it smothers one to look at," and Miss Ainslie moved away, leaving her father and Captain Dunstan together, and carrying with her a sense of having been snubbed, which she did not like. Amabel Ainslie was, however, more thoroughly good-humoured than Captain Dunstan; and she very soon got over it, because she merely liked him without being the very least bit in the world in love with him—a state of feeling as regards himself in which perhaps no modern young man ever thoroughly believes.

This little episode took place within a few hours of their arrival at Point de Galle, and the intimation it conveyed to the Ainslies, that with their travelling companionship their acquaintance might also come to an end, was unwelcome. The Ainslies were to be received, during their brief stay at Galle, at the house of a civilian, of standing in the service equal to that of Mr. Ainslie, of habit as spare, of complexion as brown, of texture as sun-dried, but of notions different. How any sane man could be induced to "retire" to the horrors of an English climate, Mr. Gilchrist could not conceive. If Ainslie had "retired" from Bombay to Ceylon, indeed, there might

have been some sense in it—but England! He would give Ainslie just five years to live, with his narrow chest, too, and would be much surprised should he be found to avail himself of that liberal concession.

The travellers landed at the picturesque port, where the blowingness and growingness everywhere, the smothered-in-green look of everything, announce the land of perpetual summer; farewells were exchanged, and the Ainslies were conveyed to the house of Mr. Gilchrist, while Captain Dunstan proceeded to the hotel at which he thought it likely he might find his friend. Before they said good-bye, however, Mr. Ainslie made a slow little speech to Captain Dunstan, which caused that languid young officer to feel rather ashamed of himself for having set the complacent owner of the Chantry down as a bore only.

"My daughter tells me," said the brown little man, "that we have been mistaken in supposing that you are to be at Bevis this autumn, but I hope we need not on that account relinquish our expectation of seeing you again before long. It will give us the sincerest pleasure if you will come to us at the Chantry as soon, and stay with us as long, as you please."

Captain Dunstan cordially acknowledged, and provisionally accepted, the invitation, which was frankly seconded by Amabel. That young lady had somehow contrived to make Captain Dunstan feel that, although she liked him, perhaps better than he liked her, still the sentiment was mere liking; he was a little ashamed of the touch of coxcombry that had existed in his relations with her. Mrs. Ainslie said the fewest and coldest words that were possible on the occasion; but her words were always few and cold, except where her own ailments or her own injuries were concerned; then they were many and vehement, and nobody minded them. She hoped Captain Dunstan would take care of himself—those recurrent fevers were bad things.

"Did you say his name was Dunstan?" asked Mr. Gilchrist of his infatuated guest, "and that he's going home on sick-leave?"

Mr. Gilchrist had met his party at the landing-steps, and seen Captain Dunstan.

"Yes, but he is staying here awhile; goes on by the French steamer."

"Then he's the man Esdaile is looking out for. You know who Esdaile is Ainslie? Poor Tom Esdaile's boy. You have not forgotten Tom, in our time, at Westminster?"

"I remember him," said Mr. Ainslie, with slow deliberation; "he was intended for the Indian service, but had his prospects destroyed by coming into his uncle's baronetcy Yes. I remember him."

"You may well say destroyed. Tom was not long about going out of his uncle's baronetcy—the wildest fool that ever made a short, and anything but merry life of what might have been an honourable career. He married a very pretty girl without a rupee, and died when the boy was a baby Several years later, the widow came in for a good deal of property; it was *her* uncle this time who retired in her favour, and now she is dead, and poor Tom's boy is a rich man. His affairs were well managed; his mother lived on half nothing until she came into her uncle's money, and then she saved the greater part of that. He is a good-looking young fellow; I should not wonder if he was rather wild, like his father, but he has more brains and a better constitution than poor Tom—he dined with me yesterday"

"What brings him here?"

"A very proper desire to see his own estate with his own eyes. He owns a coffee plantation between Kandy and Nooralia—it went to the dogs for a time, after his mother's death, but he sent out a Scotch manager, and it's flourishing now, I believe. He expected to find Captain

Dunstan here, or, at least, he thought it likely ; and was talking about him yesterday."

"That is a coincidence. Amabel, my dear, you have heard me mention that a friend of mine used to say, 'There are only half-a-dozen people in the world.' This is a case in point. Captain Dunstan knows the Chantry, and we meet Captain Dunstan ; then we come here, and find that a friend of his dined with our friend yesterday. I daresay young Esdaile knows the Chantry too, and Bevis."

"Bevis in Suffolk, yes." Mr. Gilchrist spoke very dryly here. "He does know Bevis, so do I—at least, I did, thirty years ago, in the early days of Admiral Drummond's time ; he was talking about the old place too, and it seems Captain Dunstan has been very badly treated. That was another case of uncle and nephew, you know."

"We don't know," said Amabel ; "he never said anything about an Admiral Drummond."

And then she gave a little self-approving reflection to her own sagacity ; she knew there was "something" in the way he had taken her harmless remark about his going "home" to Bevis. Who could have anticipated that this old Mr. Gilchrist, whom she was, of course, very glad to see, on her father's account, could possibly have had anything to tell them that would render him interesting to Amabel on his own?

The spacious verandah of the best-managed hotel in the East presented a picturesque appearance of its own, and afforded an animated prospect to its occupiers on the afternoon of the following day, as Edward Dunstan and his friend—each reclining in a deep and luxurious Cingalese chair, with a little bamboo table at his elbow—smoked their cigarettes, and talked by fits and starts ; but for the most part amused themselves with the novel and characteristic scene. The verandah had many occupants, either in groups, in pairs, or singly, engaged precisely as Sir Wilfrid

Esdaile and Edward Dunstan were engaged. Outward-bound people; homeward-bound people; rich men, travelling for amusement; enterprising men, travelling for gain; scientific men, travelling in the interests of science; officials on their way to the scene of their employment; and specimens of the genus loafer, who are to be met with everywhere in the world, even in those places which are most difficult and most expensive to reach. They are only loafers when they get there; but they do get there, somehow. The outward-bound people looked healthy and interested; while the homeward-bound people looked faded and bored.

That delicious cinnamon-scented breeze which tempers the heat of the day in Ceylon, but unhappily fails at nightfall, came floating under the wide-spreading eaves of the piazza, bearing with it many mingled sounds of strange tongues from the streets thronged with the puzzling figures of whom Sir Charles Dilke says, that he set down, as a rule for his own guidance, "Everybody that was womanly as a man, and everybody that was manly as a woman." The crowd presented an epitome of a great part of the world; and Dunstan and Esdaile saw it as the author of "Greater Britain" saw it: "Composed of Cingalese, Kandians, Moormen, with crimson caftans and shaven crowns, forming its body, but including Portuguese, Chinese, Jews, Arabs, Parsees, Englishmen, Malays, Dutchmen, half-caste burghers, and now and then a veiled Arabian woman, or a Veddah, one of the aboriginal inhabitants of the isle."

Conspicuous among the groups were numerous native merchants, clad in silken robes of gorgeous colours and quite dazzling cleanliness. A fairer scene could hardly be found on the surface of the earth than this, under a sky so lofty, speckless, and seemingly infinite in its domed grandeur. The occupants of the verandah smoked their pipes of curious form, or more common-place cigars, sipped cooling drinks, borrowed from the Western Hemisphere chiefly, or ate ices flavoured with the delicious fruits of

Ceylon, while one of the most ancient and unchanged institutions of the world was in full work among them. Vendors of precious stones, licensed by the proprietors, have their rights of entry into the hotel and its verandah; and these chafferers, patient and persuasive, were circulating among the visitors, each urging the merits of his own wares and depreciating those of his competitors with that wheedling secretiveness which has its utmost expression in the pedlar class. Some of these jewel-sellers, of many races and nations of the East, carried their wares on little trays suspended from their necks; others had them roughly tied up in bits of cotton rag, which they twisted about in their lean brown fingers as they extolled the value and beauty of their "catty-eye" and "pinkee collal."

The two men seated in a corner of the verandah were not spared the importunities of the jewel-sellers—one of whom, a keen-eyed, hatchet-faced old man, with snaky brown fingers, attached himself to them with such perseverance that at length Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, to get rid of him, told him to go and bother the other people; he and his friend were not going on, and would look in at the shop on the next day. After a quick glance at the face of the Englishman, the Cingalese retired at once, with twinkling eyes; and the next moment was pressing his wares on the attention of a fat German with a fat ring on his thick forefinger.

"That voluble little fellow has very pretty things in his shop," said Esdaile. "We'll look him up to-morrow. I haven't seen more curious curios anywhere. But, to go on with what we were saying, are you serious about trying a planter's life?"

"Quite serious. I can't get on in the army, without more money than I've got; and I'm sick of it besides. There never was anything invented in this world so dull as the life in India when there's nothing doing. There's

nothing doing now, or likely to be; and then my health has gone all to smash. There is no chance for me in England; and, besides, I hate England."

"I cannot understand that. I should have thought you were just the man to hate every place except England. I do, at least, for long."

"Yes; that's natural. But look at the difference between us—between your experience of England and mine. There is nothing in the world better than the best that England can give a man; and you have that, or almost that. I suppose you don't want to be a duke or a Rothschild; and, as you don't want that, you've got about all you do want. And you can do as you like; you are as free as air, and more completely your own master than any man I know."

"That's all quite true. Of course, I know I'm very lucky; but why should you say there's no charm for you in England? You can put the money you wish to speculate with into things there."

"There is not enough of it, and I don't know anything about business. Besides, in England I'm a failure already. I am a disappointed man; and that tells with everybody, beginning with myself. I start with a disability I could not take kindly to a city life in London, after all that happened. Of course there never was anything of the kind, and I don't suppose any one ever said such a thing; but I feel as if I had sailed under false colours before the admiral's death—and, in fact, I mean to keep out of London."

"You feel that because you are ill, and because you had a shock; but it is all nonsense. Of course you believed that you were to have Bevis; why should you not? Everybody believed it, and everybody said the old admiral must have been mad, when it came out that you hadn't got the place."

"It was not the admiral that was mad," said Edward Dunstan, very quietly, "it was I."

"You!"

"Yes, I. I don't feel up to much talking just now; but some time or other I will tell you all about it. I think I will go and lie down now; there's no sleeping in the still heat of the night here. I shall find you at dinner-time."

Edward Dunstan left his friend, who continued to smoke with an air of more than usual reflection.

"He looks ill," thought Sir Wilfrid; "and I don't like this notion of his. Turning planter, with only a small share in the concern, isn't lively for a man in a good regiment, who had twelve thousand a year ahead of him until two years ago. I should have thought anything at home would have been livelier; especially after two years in India. He has lots of friends. He'll soon be all right; he is pulled down by the fever. There can't be anything else in it."

It was not surprising that Sir Wilfrid Esdaile should take things easily, his friend's troubles included; for he had not any of his own, and he was of a cheerful temperament. Captain Dunstan had described Esdaile's condition with considerable fidelity, and nature had not in this instance been so cross-grained as to supply a drawback to its advantages in the young man's own disposition. Mr. Gilchrist was not far wrong in suspecting an hereditary turn for wildness in Tom Esdaile's boy, but it had not led him much astray as yet. His pleasant face, well set-up figure, good manners, musical voice, and a certain quickness which was not quite cleverness, but did as well in the case of a man who, having money, did not need brains for the making it, would have recommended him to the good graces of society, even without the fortune and the title which established him in them.

On the following day Esdaile and Dunstan visited the shop of the persistent and voluble jewel-seller. Esdaile made several purchases, Dunstan but one — a slim, keen dagger, in a beautifully-wrought sheath of tortoiseshell.

The next morning at dawn the friends started for Colombo, taking the coach by the coast road.

CHAPTER VI.

A CONFIDENCE BY THE WAY.

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile and his friend were at first too much occupied by the exceeding beauty of the road, and the distant majesty of the great mountain range—on whose towering south-eastern peak local tradition has it that Adam mourned his son one hundred years—to interrupt their impressions by conversation. To both the scene was novel; Sir Wilfrid Esdaile was then visiting Ceylon for the first time, and Dunstan had merely touched at Galle on his voyage out: to the one, because he was in good health and high spirits; to the other, because he was enjoying the change from the ship to land-travelling, and also because he was eagerly anticipating a climate that should revive him, the journey was pleasant.

The light coach, with its four small horses and its shouting attendants, dashed along at a great pace through the country in which it is always summer, and everything and everybody are always *en fête*. The air was dazzlingly bright, and, as the hours went on, the features of the scene wore many varied aspects, all beautiful and full of life. The perfectly kept road through an avenue of giant cocoa-nut palms, is thickly set with native huts, and never winds out of sight of the purple sea. At short intervals it crosses the lagoons, where there are crowds of bathers, and travellers get a rapid view of the villages, each with its bazaar, and its temple of the pagoda shape that seems, to those who have never seen it, impossible off a plate or a teapot. Buddhist priests in saffron robes, attended by boys clad in white, who hold yellow silk umbrellas over their sleek, sage heads; groups of Cingalese in many-coloured attire, on foot, and travelling singly in small bullock-carts, fill the road, which after some time lies through more varied scenery, and is bordered by the scarlet-blossomed cotton-tree and the areca palm.

Dunstan had slept soundly, in spite of the heat on the previous night, and was looking better, and more cheerful. His two years' experience of the East came to the aid of Esdaile's lack of knowledge, and for some time, when they talked at all, it was only of the strange and interesting scene around them, and the curious aspect of the dense population of the almost continuous village that lies between Galle and Colombo. Esdaile, who was one of those sensible travellers who like to know what they ought to look for at certain places, had brought "Greater Britain" with him, and he consulted its pages when he wanted to identify the features of the landscape.

When the coach journey was over, Esdaile and Dunstan would recognise that no description could be truer than that which told them how they had "dashed through the bazaars and cocoa groves, then across the golden sands covered with rare shells, and fringed on the one side with the bright blue dancing sea, dotted with many a white sail, and on the other with deep green jungle, in which were sheltered dark lagoons." And again, how "once in a while they would drive out on to a plain, varied by clumps of fig and tulip-trees, and, looking to the east, would sight the purple mountains of the central range; then, dashing again into the thronged bazaars, would see little but the bright palm-trees relieved upon an azure sky."

Long before they entered "the Christian Kyngdom of Colombo," to speed through its cinnamon-gardens, where the cinnamon-laurel contrasts beautifully with the red soil, and the air is alive with dragon-flies and winged beetles, the conversation of the evening before had recurred to Esdaile's memory, and he tried to lead his friend to talk of the circumstances that had altered his prospects, and seemingly estranged him from England. Esdaile had met Dunstan at a "good" club, and then at several "good" houses, and his position in society, even apart from the expectations which had in some inexplicable way been

disappointed, was well defined. But, beyond this, and the fact that Dunstan was a very good fellow, and that he liked him, Esdaile was ignorant. When Mr. Gilchrist stated his belief that Captain Dunstan had been "badly treated," and did so apropos of what "Tom Esdaile's boy" had said to him, he spoke much more from his own former knowledge, and that remembrance of distant persons and things which is kept so clear in the uneventful routine of life in an eastern country, than from anything his visitor had imparted to him.

"It would depend a good deal on what Sandilands tells us about that kind of thing," said Sir Wilfrid, "whether you make up your mind."

"About turning coffee-planter? Well, yes. I should think a good deal of his opinion, of course. It is not as if I knew anything about the business; it is only an idea like another, as the French say. Sandilands is a clever fellow, isn't he?"

"He must be. He has made this plantation of mine pay—or, at least, promise to pay—and it was never anything but a source of vexation before his time. He is a long-headed, quiet-tempered fellow, and a desperate hard worker. Not to be beat; a regular Scotchman."

"A man of no family, or fortune, I suppose; or he would have laid out his lines in pleasanter places."

"No; just a well-educated man, middle-class in birth, but of first-rate education, and energy enough for a dozen like you and me."

"Ah," said Dunstan, with a sigh, "I don't know about you. You don't require energy for anything, except amusing yourself; but I should certainly be much the better for an additional spice of that quality. It is deuced hard to begin all over again."

"It is, indeed; and unjust too. Though you would not allow me to say so yesterday."

"No; there you're wrong. It is hard, but it is not

unjust. I'm better now. This delightful air revives one; and we are in the very realm and atmosphere of story-telling. I'll tell you all about it."

Edward Dunstan threw away the end of his cigar, whilst Esdaile lighted a fresh one, and after a glance round and ahead of the coach, rolling rapidly along, he began:

"Once upon a time, a long time ago, a young man, named Edward Dunstan, who had nothing to recommend him except good blood, good looks, a commission in a line regiment, and about two hundred a year, had the good luck to meet and fall in love with the loveliest and best woman in the world. Her name was Helena Drummond. She was the only sister of Admiral—or, as he then was, Captain—Drummond, of Bevis, in Suffolk. She had no parents living, and her brother was her guardian. She married the young subaltern, and they lived very happily ever after. Is the beginning of the story romantic enough?"

"Quite. The parties were your father and mother?"

"They were. They lived happily ever after. But they did not live long; and my mother's brother could never be brought to regard their marriage with favour. It did not matter much to them while they were together, I fancy; but when my father died, quite young, and my mother was left with me, and nothing but her small pension and my father's two hundred pounds a year on which to keep herself and educate me, and start me in the world, she was obliged to think of the future, and to regret the estrangement between herself and her only brother. I don't really know what it was that happened—I was only seven at the time—but the next thing that I remember, after my father's death, was finding myself in a large country house, with fields, and trees, and gardens; with water, and boats, and animals; and being immensely delighted with all these things."

"Did you take to your uncle?"

"Not particularly; nor did he take to me. He was an

odd sort of man. A very good man, I am sure, but he was not at home on dry land; and he carried the orderliness that we always hear sailors praised for to a fault. I can remember my poor mother's nervousness about my destructive ways. I was a mischievous young dog, no doubt; I liked the house and the place better when my uncle was not there than when he was. This, however, is all too old a story to interest you. My mother died just after I was sent to Harrow, and I never again had any home-feeling about Bevis. It may have been a year later perhaps that my uncle married, and I had the sense to know that the event was of great importance to me. I had been told, young as I was, that I was to come in for my uncle's property; and my juvenile notions of my own dignity and grandeur sprouted pretty freely I was ordered home for the holidays by a short letter from my uncle, in which he informed me that I was to be introduced to my aunt, and that he hoped I would so conduct myself as to merit her goodwill and regard."

"This you did not do, I presume."

"Precisely; this I did not do. The first thing I perceived when I arrived at Bevis, was that the house was much finer than it had formerly been; new furniture, new pictures, all sorts of beautiful things that I had never seen had changed its old aspect, and the whole thing was on a bigger and more imposing scale. I afterwards came to know that my uncle's wife had a large fortune of her own; that he had been engaged to her many years before, when they were both young, and something had happened to prevent the marriage —a lovers' quarrel of some sort. They did not meet for years; but when they met, the old state of things revived, and they were married. I enjoyed myself very much that first time. There were horses, and dogs, and new faces, though no more visitors than before; and my uncle and Mrs. Drummond left me very much to myself. It was not till just before I left Harrow that Mrs. Drummond showed any dislike of me; she did then, however, and it has never varied. She has disliked me, boy and man, ever since."

"And yet, as she had no children, she could not feel that you were interfering with her in any way?"

"True; and I did not give her much trouble. In a big house of that kind, people who don't get on together can keep very clear of each other, and I kept clear of her. She is a strong-minded, firm-willed woman, and she had unbounded influence over my uncle from first to last. There was not much prejudice in my favour on his part for her to overcome, but what there was she uprooted; he hardly noticed me latterly, and after I went to Woolwich he never once wrote to me with his own hand. I used to get short notes from her, generally to the effect that I had better be very careful in money matters, for, if I exceeded my allowance, I need not look to them to pay my debts; and as I knew precisely what I had in the world to come into, independent of them—that is, two hundred a year—I should be the best judge of the wisdom of involving myself in liabilities."

"And I suppose, as a matter of course, you did exceed your allowance."

"Of course I did. You are prepared to learn that, naturally; but you will not be prepared to learn that after all those lectures and warnings my uncle paid up for me; and it was Mrs. Drummond who made him do it."

"I am not at all surprised," said Sir Wilfrid, with a smile. "I rather fancied Mrs. Drummond wasn't altogether a bad sort; but only one of those desperately-conscientious and straight-going women—believers in energy and that kind of thing—whose bark is generally much worse than their bite."

"Ah! but hers wasn't," replied Captain Dunstan, with emphasis, "for you know what her bite was."

"The admiral's will? Eh?"

"Just that. I don't mean to say I was all I ought to have been, in any sense, and you know I started by telling you it wasn't unjust, though it seemed a little, or more than a little, hard. Mrs. Drummond was not a tyrant,

you must understand, but she had a natural talent for governing, and my uncle had a natural aptitude for being governed by any woman, except his sister, who would have taken the trouble, and so she had the upper hand completely; and though she made my uncle pay up for me, and start me quite clear, she had no sort of compunction about telling him this was all he was to do for me. She thoroughly meant it, and she told me so. I cannot say I ever had much faith in Bevis coming to me. Everybody who knew about the circumstances, and that there was nobody else nearly or remotely related to the admiral, took it for granted, and of course the tradespeople and the money-lenders could not be persuaded to the contrary."

"It was said everywhere, I know," said Sir Wilfrid; "and I'm sure all the women believed it—the mothers, I mean."

"They never had any reason to do so given them by me," answered Dunstan. "I never sailed, during my brief voyage on the treacherous sea of society, under false colours of any kind. People drew their own conclusions; I did not suggest them."

"I call the admiral an old fool myself," said Sir Wilfrid, coolly. "He must have known it was only a case of prejudice; and, if it comes to that, I don't think he had any right to leave the whole property to his wife—for more than her life, that is—land ought to remain in the blood and in the name."

"You speak with the authority of one who was born an heir-apparent, my dear fellow," said Dunstan, laughing, "and you forget that my name is not Drummond. If I had been a brother's son, the case would have been different. Of course, I don't mean to say that I at any time quite realised the truth that I should never be a bit better off than I was when I joined my regiment; I ought to have known it, and acted on the knowledge, just as we all ought to know such lots of things, and to act on them; only we don't. Well, there's no good in dwelling on all that now. If my uncle

had died a year sooner, and I had known for certain how it was to be with me, I should have been saved a good deal."

"How? Had you come to grief again?"

"In the way of debts? No, not so very much in that respect; but in others. People made mistakes about me, and I made mistakes about them, and I got heavily hit."

Esdaile listened to his friend with quickened curiosity now. Could there have been anything more? he had asked himself the day before, when he noticed that Dunstan was looking so ill. There had been something more. Odd that he had never suspected anything, for he had seen a good deal of Dunstan from the beginning of their acquaintance until Dunstan's departure for India; they were in the same set in London, and the one had generally known what the other was doing during that interval. But Dunstan was a reticent man in certain respects—never until to-day, in the confidence induced by their meeting in a strange and distant land, had he said a word of the real nature of the circumstances that had been discussed among their common acquaintance in England, in happy ignorance of the facts. And it might be that Esdaile knew nothing of the lady. That the "something more" in the case was a lady Sir Wilfrid had no doubt at all.

Esdaile thought all this during a scarcely perceptible pause, after which Dunstan resumed:

"It was soon over. The blunders on all sides did not take more than six weeks in the making, but the whole business left me without heart to face India and regimental work; and it disgusted me in every way. I suppose you can guess what it was that hit me hard?"

"Of course I can—a woman," said Sir Wilfrid, with the grave sententiousness of an elderly sage, to whom no vagary of the human mind or accident of human fate can be strange or disconcerting. "Who was she?"

"Don't ask me. It was not her fault, but I could not expect any one except myself to believe that, and so I must

not give any one the chance of blaming her. I met her just as one always meets everybody in London, and—— Well, it was all over with me very speedily." Dunstan laughed, by no means naturally or easily. "I saw a good deal of her, and it seemed to me that there was not any desire on the part of her father and mother to keep us apart; rather the contrary, indeed. She was very pretty and very bright; and I had every reason to think she liked me. I never deceived her about myself in any way—that I could swear; and if her parents questioned her, they too would have heard exactly the truth. Of course, I knew that I was the reputed heir to Bevis; but when that matter was mooted to me, I always said it was not only uncertain, but, to the best of my belief, unlikely. However, people chose, I imagine, to believe and represent it as a certainty; and to this I was indebted, as I found out afterwards, for the kind reception I had from—the lady's parents. You were away at this time; it was just before our cruise in Singleton's yacht. And, as I said before, my delusion had a short life, if a merry one. I danced with her at a ball one night, and had very nearly spoken, when she was taken away by her mother; but I had been asked to luncheon the next day, and I meant to go, and watch for a chance of speaking then. I believed, and I had good reason for believing, that an opportunity would be made for me. The following morning came a letter from Mrs. Drummond, summoning me at once to Bevis. I was not to delay an hour; my uncle was alarmingly ill, and had asked for me. The letter reached me at nine; there was a train at eleven; I packed a portmanteau, and then I wrote the words I had intended to speak that day. The house was in my way to the station, and I left my letter at the door myself, with an explantion of my hurried departure. When I arrived at Bevis, I found the admiral still living, but unconscious. He never rallied again, and he never spoke to me. Two days later, he died. I was distracted with anxiety, as you may suppose. No

answer to my letter reached me. According to his directions, the admiral's will was not read until after his funeral had taken place, and when it was read, there was no mention of me in the document. With the exception of a few legacies to his old servants, and to one or two charitable institutions for sailors, the admiral left the whole of his property of every kind and description whatsoever to the absolute disposal of his wife. I don't deny that it was a great shock to me, but I think I stood it pretty well. I shall always be convinced that, when the family lawyer left Bevis that evening, he carried with him the draft of a neat paragraph which appeared the next day in the evening papers, recording the death of the admiral, and his testamentary dispositions, and that it was written by Mrs. Drummond."

"Sharp practice, that!" said Esdaile; "what did she do it for?"

"I don't know, but I am sure she did it, and perhaps she did me an unconscious kindness by hastening my fate. I went back to London, and received a very civil letter from the lady's mother, setting forth that, under the circumstances, she was sure I would see that the past had better be ignored—she did not blame me; it was well things had gone no farther. But I need not describe the letter. It was perfectly reasonable, and entirely heartless."

"You saw the girl, of course?"

"Oh yes; I saw her, in a crowd. I danced with her too, under the indignant eyes of her mother, who need not, however, have been afraid. She would not have had the courage to marry me then; I should not have been fool enough to ask her. I thoroughly realised the vast difference between its being possible that one may be a rich man in time, and the absolute certainty that one must always remain a poor one. But it could not harm either of us that I should know she would have said 'yes' if all had been as right as all was wrong. A hang-dog kind of consolation, no doubt, but I found some in it and I made no end of a

fool of myself. I talked, and afterwards, when there was no chance of seeing her, I wrote a lot of nonsense about winning fortune and her in time, about eternal constancy, and the chances there might be in the future for true hearts. I got a couple of timid little notes, without a bit of assurance in them, in return, but still I think she really cared for me; what can a girl do, you know, in the world of these days, and hampered as she is by all the ways and customs of her life?"

"For that matter," said Esdaile, "what can any of us do? You would not have married her then, if you could—I suppose you would not marry her now?"

"Yes, I would. Two years of another country, with nothing to do but think of her, have changed my mind about the comparative wisdom or folly of venturing a little. However, there is no use in thinking about it. I am worse off, instead of better; and even if I do go in for coffee-planting and make something of it, it would come too late."

"She did not promise to wait for better times, or anything of that kind? People don't, nowadays."

"And she is, though quite charming, of her time. No, she promised nothing; and I only know that she hasn't married."

"See here, old fellow," said Esdaile, after a moment's pause; "I'm awfully sorry for you, but I wish she had married. If she hadn't the pluck to stand by you then, she wouldn't have it any later, you know, and what's the good of hankering after what you can't have? This business has been playing the very deuce with you; lending a helping hand to the fever, and doubling the boredom of India. You won't do yourself any good by going home if you've got this on your mind."

"I know that," said Dunstan, sadly, "and I did not mean to stay a day longer in England than I must, to settle some business. If I hit this off with Sandilands, I shall come out again at once. And now you know all about it, and we will talk of something else."

He then began to comment on the beauty of the country they were driving through with great animation, but did not find a free response from his companion. Esdaile was thinking over the little romance of real life of which Dunstan had just given him the outline, and trying to fit in the names and the characters. He and Dunstan had a number of acquaintances in common; he wondered who, among them, were the prudent mother and the timid, half-hearted daughter in question. The nameless young lady did not by any means charm Sir Wilfrid's imagination. After a few minutes, however, he gave up the problem.

"They're all alike," said he to himself; "it's no good trying to identify the parties. It's the way of the world; and there's something to be said for it after all."

Soon after, the scene changed to the environs of the capital of the island, and the swift-rolling coach bore the travellers through the cinnamon gardens—where the Dutch burgher families arrayed in white were taking the air, the ladies wearing natural flowers in their jet-black hair—to the hotel outside the walls, their immediate destination.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE.

THE railway line from Colombo to Kandy has been pronounced to be "the most beautiful in the world;" lying as it does through a country which combines all the charms of park, garden, and forest scenery, with a horizon of noble and graceful mountains. Sir Wilfrid Esdaile and Edward Dunstan, after a brief stay at Colombo (where they too felt the astonishment so many travellers have expressed at the spectacle presented by vigorous cricket-playing under the burning afternoon sun of Ceylon) resumed their journey, and were met at its termination by a person, to making whose acquaintance Dunstan had looked forward with curiosity and interest.

Cordial were the greetings exchanged between Sir Wilfrid and the dark, large-limbed, brown-eyed, auburn-bearded Scotchman, who had undertaken the management of a portion of Esdaile's inheritance which Esdaile himself had regarded with dismay. The new arrivals took their places in a rough-looking waggonette, and were driven off in the direction of the plantation, twenty miles away; and while the employer and employed were talking about persons and things far removed from the scene, Edward Dunstan, after the first few sentences that followed on his friend's introduction of him to Mr. Sandilands, kept silence, occupying himself with a close observation of the Scotch manager.

The result was favourable, to the mind of Dunstan, who was easily swayed by externals, and rather prided himself on "taking to a fellow at once if he was ever to take to him at all."

Here was a capable-looking man, he thought, with a keen, decisive face, and a way with him which conveyed the impression that he could manage anything in the world he thought it worth his while to put his mind to. If he had only had one of those big chances which come in the way of highly-born dunderheads, a man with that face, and that unhesitating, knowledgeable way of talking, would have made his mark in any of the important avocations of the world; but he had not been so fortunate, and the next best thing was to make a success of a little chance, like that which had come to him.

Here was a man, Dunstan thought, who could look through an unsatisfactory condition, like this, and see what might be done with it for the best. Dunstan was a good deal given to leaning on other people, and the solid independence that expressed itself in John Sandilands' face, figure, manner, and way of talking, was particularly calculated to attract him. In the first place he looked the picture of health, and that, in itself, was wonderful to

Dunstan, who could not think how he managed it. Ceylon was better than India, to be sure ; but, all the same, there was always a good deal of fever about ; and yet he could swear that John Sandilands had never had a touch of it. His steady eyes were too bright, his skin was too clear, his hair and beard were too glossy, his long, slight, strong hands looked too cool, and obeyed the orders of his brain too closely, as he skilfully drove the horses—the best treated animals Dunstan had yet seen in Ceylon—for the fever-fiend ever to have iced or scorched that finely-knit frame.

The Scotchman was singularly unlike both his guests ; but although he had neither the merry and prosperous expression of Sir Wilfrid, nor the marked refinement and somewhat pensive good looks of Edward Dunstan, he was a finer type of manhood than either. Perhaps nobody, not even a woman, had ever called John Sandilands handsome ; but then it had probably never occurred to anybody to remember, after an hour passed in his company, whether he was good-looking or the reverse.

The bungalow was surrounded by a clear space of hard-beaten earth bounded by a bamboo paling, beyond which were noble trees of various species, and in the distance on each side spread the "plantation" proper. Though much superior in neatness and order to most dwellings of the kind, John Sandilands' bungalow, and the offices and works in its rear, had a good deal of the bare and comfortless appearance inseparable from all such places. The beauty of the sky, the earth, and the climate is enough, or people seem to think so ; for the rest, space and shelter are all the houses are expected to bestow.

Cordial relations established themselves between John Sandilands and Edward Dunstan before the first day of their companionship closed, and the former expressed himself to Esdaile as much interested in his friend, ready to advise him to the best of his ability, and to begin, so soon as he should wish, the process of showing him how things

ought to be done on a coffee-plantation whose manager means to make it pay

"I fancy he would never make such a hand of it as you are doing, however," said Esdaile, on the day following their arrival, when he and Sandilands had been "going round," while Dunstan was resting. "He has not the health, in the first place. You're wonderful in that way, you know. You might never have been off your native heath, for any touch of the climate there's upon you."

"My native heath is Glasgow," said Sandilands smiling, "and I was never well there. Dunstan would do here as well as I, if he neither smoked nor drank, and did not take to moping."

"Ay, there's the rub. It is not easy for a man with a big disappointment in his life to settle down to this sort of thing."

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile had not yet attained to any very clear knowledge of what "sort of thing" the life of a coffee-planter really was, but he had not seen anything to shake his previous general conviction that he individually should hate it.

"No," thought John Sandilands, "this is rather the sort of thing for a man with a great hope in his life." And his fancy swiftly cleft the barriers of space, and showed him, far across the sea, the face of a girl, in whose widely-different life a hope, similar to that which brightened his own, burned steadily.

"It's not easy," he replied, "for a man to settle to anything completely different from what he has been brought up to expect. I think a bringing up in great expectations is the worst of misfortunes."

"When they're not fulfilled—yes. Dunstan has stood it wonderfully well; I should have gone to the bad all out in his place."

Then they talked of other matters, and Sir Wilfrid Esdaile did not say anything which implied that Dunstan

had a cause of discontent and heartburning, beyond that supplied by Admiral Drummond's will.

The coffee-plantation in which Dunstan thought of buying a share, was at a considerable distance from Esdaile's, and according to the hospitable practice of the island, the manager invited Sandilands and his friends on a visit of several days. This invitation suited Dunstan's purpose well, and it was agreed that he and Sandilands should accept it, while Sir Wilfrid Esdaile made one or two short excursions, and studied the resources of Kandy. After a week, Esdaile had had quite enough of his own plantation, especially as the manager insisted, not only upon detailing to him, but also upon making him understand, everything which was involved in the business of a coffee-plantation. Esdaile felt that he really could not stand anybody else's coffee, and works, coolies, and returns, and had therefore excused himself. A mail from England would be due in five days ; they would pick up their letters and papers at Kandy on their return.

Captain Dunstan was indifferent to that subject, which is always of such importance everywhere out of London—from the neat villa in an English county where you get letters only twice a day, and find yourself unaccountably bored in the interval, although you are always ready to declare that the postal facilities of town render life wearisome—to the "station" at the Antipodes, where the arrival of the mail is the one blessed break in an existence devoted to sleep. Captain Dunstan did not expect there would be anything for him except bills and circulars, the only documents people do not tire of sending, and for the sake of despatching them will take any amount of trouble to find out one's most transient sojourn. Sandilands was always eager to get his bag, as a man of business ought to be. Esdaile was one of those persons who live in a shower of letters and papers of all kinds ; a characteristic of certain young men, occasionally of the idlest. He laughed about it, and said he should

have at least fifty commissions to buy pearls, tortoiseshell, amber beads, and models of outriggers.

"I don't know a more enviable fellow in the world than Esdaile," was almost the first observation made by Dunstan, after he and Sandilands had parted with Sir Wilfrid, and were journeying along a terribly bad road, surrounded by exquisite scenery. "He has money and liberty and health, and, in fact, everything."

"Such a happy temper too; I fancy a man must have that to enjoy even the best things of life. No doubt he will get a good deal taken-in in his time, but he will mind it less than most men. Nothing will ever sour Esdaile."

Five days later, the three young men met again at Kandy, and Sir Wilfrid was full of the charms and delights of the place. He had had a real good time of it; he had met several capital fellows, and Mr. Gilchrist had come up there from Galle.

"An extraordinary old man," said Esdaile, as he and Dunstan were sitting in the verandah of the hotel; "he knows everybody, it seems to me, though he never goes 'home,' as he still calls England, and most people do *not* come to Ceylon. A tremendous old gossip. He knows all about me, evidently, a great deal more about my father than I know, and also all about you."

"All about me!" said Dunstan; "I think that's impossible. I never heard of him until five minutes before I landed at Galle, and I was in his company afterwards for about three."

"No matter, he knows all about you. If you had not told me the story of Admiral Drummond, his wife, and his will, yourself, I should have heard it from old Gilchrist. You had some fellow-travellers, it appears, who are of opinion that the admiral made a deplorable mistake, and that even as it is you are an eligible."

"Oh," said Dunstan, laughing, but a little annoyed too; 'that's too bad—we were very good friends—but——"

"Meaning yourself and the fair Amabel, as Mr. Gilchrist calls her, with all the seriousness of an old-world novel. I am to make her acquaintance when I get back to England as the bearer of a lot of shell things from Mr. Gilchrist. By-the-bye, the old gentleman said he would look round, I mean"—added Sir Wilfrid, correcting himself, and with exact mimicry of Mr. Gilchrist's voice and manner—"he said he would do himself the honour of calling on me to-day, and would hope to have the pleasure of seeing my friends."

At this moment John Sandilands, with his hands full of letters, and followed by a native servant who carried a thick parcel of similar documents, and a bundle of newspapers, entered the verandah.

"Not a bad bag," he said, as he deposited his papers upon one of the little tables. "Heaps of newspapers and letters for you, Sir Wilfrid"—the servant laid them on the table between Esdaile and Dunstan—"and something blue and business-like for you, Dunstan. Will you inspect them here? We have it all to ourselves."

The verandah was indeed occupied only by the three gentlemen for the moment. John Sandilands spread out his letters in an orderly fashion, and began to work through them methodically. There was, however, one which he did not open on the present occasion. He picked it out, and put it away for enjoyment at a quiet time, when he should have mastered the business matters that the mail had brought him.

"Now for the commissions and the circulars," said Sir Wilfrid, as he picked up a handful of letters, and letting them fall through his fingers again, detained one at random.

The missive for Dunstan was addressed in a hand which he did not recognise, and he took it up with absolute unconcern. The contents of the blue linen-lined cover proved to be a brief communication from a solicitor in London, with whom he was not acquainted, to the effect that, pursuant to instructions received, he had to inform Captain

Dunstan of the decease, at Bevis, Suffolk, of the widow of the late Admiral Drummond, and also that the deceased lady had bequeathed to Captain Dunstan all the property of every kind left to her by her late husband. A black-bordered envelope was enclosed in the lawyer's calm and curt epistle, but it fell to the ground unnoticed as Edward Dunstan read again and again the few lines that had changed his fate. They ended with an assurance of Mr. Cleeve's readiness to carry out any instructions with which he might be favoured by Captain Dunstan.

Many feelings, or rather, vague sensations passed over Edward Dunstan—surprise, pleasure, the excitement of a great event, a sudden sense of change, bewildering and almost oppressive—and yet under these he was conscious of a strange prevision of every detail of his daily life which would be affected by that change ; while above them all there was incredulity. This thing could not be : the reversal of all that had befallen him at the most important period of his life, the repeal of the sentence that had shut him out from the paradise of rich men, the sheathing of the flaming sword that barred him from its gates, could not have come to pass. He looked up from the letter ; he passed his hand over his eyes, like one light-headed. For the moment nothing was distinct that was near and actual. With the wonderful velocity of thought and imagination he had sped to England ; he saw the old familiar scenes that had grown so unfamiliar to him of late ; he saw the days of his boyhood, the face of his dead mother, the broad lands of which he was now the owner ; the dreary and monotonous scenes of his life in India. And all this in a speck of time so brief that it was the exclamation to which he gave utterance, as his eyes took in the meaning of the lawyer's letter, that attracted the attention of Sir Wilfrid Esdaile and John Sandilands.

"What's the matter?" asked the former, quickly. "Anything wrong, Dunstan?"

"Nothing wrong, but something very strange and surprising. I can hardly believe it; but Mrs. Drummond is dead—and——"

"And she has left the place and the money to a hospital, or her lapdog?"

"She has left the place and the money to me!"

"No!" exclaimed Esdaile, starting up, and clapping his hand on Dunstan's shoulder. "You don't mean it! My dear fellow, what splendid news!"

"I do mean it; though I don't quite believe it."

Dunstan read Mr. Cleeve's letter aloud.

"There's no doubt about it," said John Sandilands. "Nothing could be more certain, more sweet, or more short than that communication. I congratulate you heartily."

"It's rather puzzling, though," said Dunstan; "what made Mrs. Drummond change her mind?"

"Ah," said Sandilands, with a comical look, "now you are unreasonable. It is much more pleasant than puzzling. The old lady may have had scruples of conscience."

"Scruples!" said Dunstan. "Not she. Indeed, why should any one, in her place, have had any scruples? The admiral was in his right. I am glad I told you so, Esdaile, before this strange thing came to pass. The strangeness of it passes all the appearance of it, I assure you, odd as that is, for Mrs. Drummond never liked me; she never even tried to like me, at a time when it might have pleased my uncle if she had tried. It was the only thing she neglected to do that could have pleased him, I do believe, for she was a model wife; that I had sense enough to know at the time. Afterwards, it would not have mattered. The admiral saw everything through her eyes, and heard everything with her ears. Never mind; he might have done worse."

"Hardly in your case, though you can certainly afford to forgive him now," said Sandilands; "she has, however, made timely reparation. I should, however, imagine that

she did not act on an impulse in this matter. Depend on it, you have been her chosen heir all this time."

"No, you are wrong; though that notion must seem to everybody except myself the most reasonable and likely. But I have reason to know that she did not intend to do anything for me. Mrs. Drummond was not a pleasant person, but she was one of the most truthful and upright women in the world, and she would not, for any motive of dislike on her own part, have allowed me to be misled all this time about my future, and to do the things I have had to do, under the obligation of no expectations at all, if she had meant all along to make me her heir."

"When did you see her last?" asked Esdaile.

"Once only since the time I told you of, after the admiral's death. She sent for me, and I went to Bevis for a week. We were perfectly frank with one another. She told me on that occasion I had nothing to expect from her, and I told her I had never formed any expectations. She requested me to remain a few days at the old place, and I did so. It was very stiff and very slow, but she meant a kindness, or at all events a civility, and I believe I wanted to show her that I was not so much cut up by my ill-luck as might have been expected. I daresay Mrs. Drummond thought better of me on that occasion than she had ever thought before; but, if she did, she did not express her sentiments. We parted very civilly, and I left Bevis with a firm belief that I should never see the place again. You see, I am in a position to assure you, Sandilands, that this is not a decision taken beforehand, and concealed out of any fanciful motive, such as administering to me a good lesson in self-reliance, or patience, or any of the virtues in which the old lady very correctly believed me to be sadly deficient."

"Yes," said Sandilands, "we must abandon that solution, which has both reason and a bit of romance in its favour. But what did you expect she would do with the place?"

When John Sandilands asked this question, Esdaile was gathering up from the floor a number of his own letters and papers, scattered by the vigorous movement with which he had welcomed Dunstan's first startling announcement. He collected the stragglers, crammed them into his pocket, and backed Sandilands' question with the remark :

"Ah, yes, by-the-bye, I have always forgotten to ask you that."

"I cannot tell you. Mrs. Drummond had no sisters, brothers, nephews, or nieces, and if she had any more distant relatives, I never knew it. She was very kind to the people about, and liberal to the local institutions, as they call them ; gave the parson any subscriptions he wanted, and all that kind of thing ; but I don't think she went in for hospitals or big charities, and it never seemed likely she would do anything in the Peabody line. The fact is, I did not think about the matter at all. When it was quite plain that Bevis was not to be mine, I did not trouble myself about the future owner of Bevis. Besides, she was a hale old lady, likely to live to any age, and so she might have done, and welcome, for me. It was the admiral who, though I always maintained that he was in his right, gave me the unkindest cut of all, not Mrs. Drummond."

"Well," said Esdaile, cheerily, "it's put right now ; and you are not much the worse. How odd you must feel it, old fellow, don't you ?"

"I hardly know how I feel it yet ; rather as if I were asleep, and, as Mark Tapley says, 'dreamin' too pleasant to last.'"

"The responsibilities of landed proprietorship," remarked John Sandilands, "will very soon come to you with the sober certainty of waking bliss. I suppose," he added, dryly, "the negotiations for a share in Perkins's plantation are not to be proceeded with ?"

Dunstan laughed. "No, I think not. How seriously we were discussing it only this morning !" he said ; "and all

the time we were up there this news was on its way. How little we ever know about ourselves or anybody else! I am aware that I am making a most common-place observation, but that sort of thing does come very strongly to one's mind now and then. I suppose," he added, "I must instruct this Mr. Cleeve, as he calls it, without delay; though I don't exactly know what he means."

"He means, I take it, that you are expected to make known when you intend to return to England and take possession. You can write by the Messageries boat, you know, the day after to-morrow. Your letters must be ready for the morning."

Esdaile had been leaning thoughtfully over the rail of the verandah, while Dunstan and Sandilands exchanged these few sentences. He now turned his head, and spoke in a half-whisper:

"Here's old Gilchrist coming along, all in white, and apparently as cool as a cucumber in northern climes. I wonder if he knows this particular bit of news?"

"I would rather not have to talk to him just now," said Dunstan, retreating on the inner side of the verandah. "Don't say anything to him if you can help it. I'll go and think over my 'instructions' to Mr. Cleeve."

"He takes it pretty coolly, doesn't he?" said Sandilands. "It is the strangest turn of the wheel of fortune that ever came under my own observation; the strangest thing I ever heard of, out of a book."

"It is an astounding and stunning event; but, my dear fellow, we, being Englishmen and superior to the emotions, are neither astounded nor stunned by anything that befalls ourselves or other people. I'm uncommonly glad, though; it's a splendid bit of luck for Dunstan. A better bit of luck than you know of, as I remember now; it means more than an estate."

"What more?"

"A wife. Only woman he ever loved; parted by the

frown of fortune : re-united by her smile ; reward of constancy ; that kind of thing. How d'ye do, sir, very glad to see you."

And Sir Wilfrid Esdaile advanced, with a pleasant deference, which was one of the charms of his manner, to meet the old civilian, who was ushered into the verandah by a profusely polite native.

After a little talk with Mr. Gilchrist, who had not yet heard the news of the change in Captain Dunstan's fortunes, and was evidently sorry to have missed an opportunity of bearing further testimony to his own admiration of the fair Amabel, John Sandilands also retired, and, on the conclusion of Mr. Gilchrist's visit, Sir Wilfrid Esdaile was left alone with his English newspapers. They were of various dates, and he found a good many bits of intelligence, fashionable and otherwise, in them, which interested him ; among others, the announcement of the death of Mrs. Drummond, of Bevis.

"After all it's very consoling and assuring to see it in print," said Sir Wilfrid to himself, without meaning any malice or ill-will to the deceased lady by reflection. And then he folded the newspaper with that particular paragraph conveniently arranged to meet the eye, in order that he might give Edward Dunstan the satisfaction of seeing it also, and opened a journal of a few days' later date.

"So Lady Rosa has made her *coup* at last," was Sir Wilfrid Esdaile's commentary upon something he saw there. "It must be a better thing for the girl than home. They say Thornton's a good fellow ; but I should never have thought she would have fancied him. Very likely she didn't —if Lady Rosa did, it would answer just as well. And Tom Dillon, too ; I didn't think that was to be till winter ! Poor fellow, he was awfully in love, but he did look dismal when he told me how his Lucy had insisted on his giving up cigars and steeplechasing." With these, and sundry similar comments, did Sir Wilfrid Esdaile peruse the passing record

of the world from which he was undergoing a temporary separation. He knew almost everybody who was anybody, and there was a good deal of general intelligence. His newspapers amused him very well until dinner, when the three young men met again, and Esdaile asked Dunstan whether he had written his letters. Dunstan said yes, they were all ready.

"And how have you instructed Mr. Cleeve?"

"That I will give him my instructions in person, with as little delay as possible. I wish you could go home with me, Esdaile. It will be such dull work to go down to Bevis all alone."

"I don't mind if I do," said Sir Wilfrid, in his light-minded way; "it would be good fun to see you as the man in possession, and I can come out again any time. Besides, you've quite done with me, Sandilands, haven't you?"

"Yes," returned John Sandilands, dryly, "from a business point of view, I have quite done with you; and, I am bound to say, you were easily exhausted."

"Then that's settled," said Dunstan; and the little party made a very pleasant evening of it. Dunstan, upon whom the excitement of the day had told, for all his "cool" taking of its great event, left the others early, and they found many subjects of discussion; among others, what Sir Wilfrid called "the Chumleigh marriage." From a casual observation, he discovered that John Sandilands had been informed of all the details of that event by a correspondent.

"Are you acquainted with Colonel and Lady Rosa Chumleigh?" asked John Sandilands, apropos of a remark of Esdaile's upon the marriages of the season.

"Yes; I know them very well."

"Lady Rosa's rather a Tartar, isn't she?"

"Crim! I should say," assented Esdaile, with emphasis. "I never was so much afraid of any one in my life; and I never pitied any one more than the Colonel. Poor old boy! Do you know them?"

"No. I know a good deal of them, in a way that I mean to tell you about. Miss Chumleigh's is one of the matches of the season."

"So I see. I don't know much of Thornton, beyond what everybody knows, that he is very rich. She is an uncommonly pretty girl, and very nice. I had not heard of the engagement, so I suppose the affair was arranged, and got over, at the usual speed. But how do you come to be interested about the Chumleighs?"

Sir Wilfrid's curiosity was excited by the apparent anomaly of any relations between people of such widely-parted worlds as those of the Chumleighs and John Sandilands, respectively; and he expressed this sentiment so frankly that John at once told him the truth. Esdaile was evidently in the way of love confidences just then; first Dunstan's, and now Sandilands' He listened to his friend's story with his usual hearty sympathy, and expressed warm admiration of Miss Carmichael.

"Of course you understand, since you have the pleasure of Lady Rosa's acquaintance," said John, when he had concluded his simple narrative, "why it is that we keep it dark for the present, and that, so far from its being a breach of duty to her uncle, it is really the very best thing Julia can do in his interests. She is the greatest comfort——"

"Alleviation," suggested Sir Wilfrid.

"Well, then, alleviation, he has in his life, especially since Miss Chumleigh's marriage, and she could not stay in the house, if she opposed Lady Rosa openly"

"Certainly not," said Sir Wilfrid, with energetic assent.

"So—there it is, you see——" John Sandilands paused, and resumed, with a touch of emotion which became him very well, "and you also see the full extent of what you have done for me. I have always wished that you should know it; it seemed ungrateful to leave you ignorant of so much the larger share of my obligation to you."

Sir Wilfrid of course received this acknowledgment with

the guilty embarrassment of his class and nation, and got it over by a burst of congratulation, and the jesting remark, that John's remarkable resignation to the lot of a coffee-planter in Ceylon was not now so mysterious in his eyes as it had been before the great secret was imparted to him.

They had a great deal to say about the fair cousin. As for the Thorntons, Sir Wilfrid opined that it would be all right.

"You see," he said, with an air of great wisdom, "if one goes in for money at the beginning, and there's lots of it, one doesn't get disappointed; but it's not safe with love—at least, not unless such a fellow as you, and such a girl as Miss Carmichael, are the parties to the other bargain." Sir Wilfrid hastened to add this admission with a confused consciousness that he had largely departed from the romantic standpoint of his recent utterances.

The last waking thought of Edward Dunstan that night was: "My darling, my darling, it has not been so very long to wait for me, after all!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"ENGLAND, HOME, AND BEAUTY."

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile and Edward Dunstan would have been equally surprised had they known that John Sandilands did not regard the news of Dunstan's unexpected good fortune as a subject of unmixed congratulation. He liked Dunstan, though with a liking in which there lurked, unconsciously, just a little contempt; and he had come, in much less time than it usually took him to add a fresh interest or a new occupation to his life, to feel solicitude about Dunstan's future, and to wish to have a hand and a place in it.

The young Scotchman's training and experience had been entirely different from anything in the lives of the

other two young men that could be called training, or that really was experience. He regarded them as beings apart from the rules or theories of life as they affected himself; as persons who had not had a chance of getting at the realities of things, and who were not to blame if they were content with sham and surface. For Sir Wilfrid Esdaile he had an elder-brotherly affection, of that old-fashioned kind which regards human relationships as real responsibilities, and invests them with genuine respect. And, besides, if there were a subject in the world, in addition to that of Julia Carmichael, on which the business-like, slow-spoken Scotchman gave the reins to his fancy and his feelings, it was his estimate of Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, and his belief in him as a favourite of fortune.

Nothing could be too bright or too good for the friend whom he had known and loved from his own boyhood, whose lines had lain in such different places from his own, and whose first impulse, when the power of wealth and independence became his, had been to give his friend the chance from which the circumstances of his life had previously debarred him. Nothing: not the heights of power—though John Sandilands was too wise, even in his enthusiasm, to think that it was in Esdaile to scale these—not the most brilliant social glories, not the friendship of the noblest of men, nor the love of the best of women! The latter most excellent thing, John Sandilands used to think sadly, might indeed be denied to his friend and hero, because there would be so little chance of testing it. The woman whom Sir Wilfrid Esdaile should love and choose, would be so fortunate, so far removed from doubt or trouble, that there could be no sacrifice—such as brings out the worth of the true character, or exposes the worthlessness of the false—no trial of constancy or patience to test her. Not to a prince in a fairy tale had things been easier and brighter than to Sir Wilfrid Esdaile; and no shadow, threatening change, was cast from any quarter of his sky upon that brightness. The ease,

frankness, and generosity of his disposition were in themselves elements in his safety from some of the worst of mortal ills.

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile would never have to work and wait for the woman he might come to love, as John was working and waiting for Julia Carmichael; and for him, doubtless, this was well. Such working and waiting would not have a charm for him, as they had for the sturdy and self-sufficing character of John Sandilands, to whom a life of ease and pleasure, such as he saw young men of the upper classes well content with, would have been intolerable. Had he been placed in circumstance like theirs, provided with a ready-made fortune and an inherited position in society, he must needs have broken those feather bonds which would have held and subdued his spirit like prison fetters, and cut out work and a career for himself somewhere, even though it were in the wildest regions of the world—probably there, indeed, in preference, because the rebound from intolerable restraint would have been most effectual.

That Sir Wilfrid Esdaile evinced no inclination to break these same bonds, but, on the contrary, was well content to lead the thistle-downy life of a man of fashion and pleasure, did not alter Sandilands' feeling about him. There was another side to his character, and that side he turned to his friend. The bit of serious purpose involved in his going out to Ceylon to inspect his property there was something—a decided step in the right direction. And John Sandilands persisted in believing, on the evidence of this alone, that Sir Wilfrid was really beginning to take life a little more seriously; although Sir Wilfrid himself had assured him that it was not the plantation, but John Sandilands, he had come out to visit.

In Dunstan's case all the circumstances were different. Here was a man who had been hit hard by fate, full between the eyes, and might be very much the better for the blow. Not the sort of man, as John Sandilands read him off, in a

quietly observant fashion he had, to be only a little the worse for having it his own way in life, but, on the contrary, likely to be one of the "nothing much" class under such circumstances.

"There might have been a lot of work in him—and that mostly good," reflected John Sandilands, as he put away his papers, on the night after the news had reached the friends, "if this whimsical old lady had left her property to a hospital; as it is, he will be rather worse than other idle rich men. Pernicious creatures, for the most part!"

Julia's letter gave him food for thought of other than the lover-like kind. It abounded, indeed, in the delightful assurances he longed for, and in the hopes he shared, and which kept up his courage and his spirits in the solitude of his ordinary life; but it troubled him too. He knew nothing at all of the people with whom Julia lived, except through Julia's own report of them; but she was clever in her way, and had the far from common faculty of conveying distinct ideas by her descriptions. John Sandilands knew how large a part in Julia's life her cousin Laura filled; he knew that her share in it was next to his own; and he was interested in all Julia told him concerning that marriage, which was so little in accordance with his own notions.

One immediate result of the turning of the wheel of fortune in the case of Edward Dunstan was a great increase of vivacity in Sir Wilfrid Esdaile. He was immensely interested in the event; it had a touch of the romantic and unexpected in it that charmed his imagination; and he was heartily pleased on his friend's account. Without being heroic in his notions, Sir Wilfrid did hold friendship as a somewhat higher bond than it is mostly esteemed in these light times, and, having no anxieties, and very little business of his own, he gave undivided attention to Dunstan's extraordinary good fortune.

When Esdaile and Sandilands met at breakfast next morning, Dunstan had not yet made his appearance. Of course the other two talked about him.

"Lucky fellow, isn't he?" said Esdaile; "and I had a notion he was one of the unlucky ones—people whose cloth is cut on the bias, as I have heard that kind of thing described."

"Here comes Dunstan," said John, presently; "he looks as if the tonic had taken effect already."

This remark was well-founded. Edward Dunstan's step was firmer, his eyes were brighter; instead of the air of lassitude which had hung about him he had a braced-up aspect, which told of a light heart.

He joined the other two, and they were speedily engaged in the discussion of the event of yesterday John Sandilands was well acquainted with the county of Suffolk, and even with the neighbourhood of Bevis; but he had never seen that place, nor had Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, and its new proprietor drew a lively picture of it for them.

"The approach is by a beautiful road, bordered with thick hedges and pine trees," said Dunstan; "and as you come up to the great gates—which are not great, by-the-by—the huge trees stand like lines of giants at the salute. There's a roomy old red-brick gate-lodge, almost hidden in roses, clematis, jessamine, woodbine—every sort of plant that creeps, and climbs, and blossoms, and scents the air; and a great shrubbery behind this lodge-garden stretches away to long lines of grand forest-trees on the right. It is a long drive through the park, which is not quite so flat as its neighbours in that part of Suffolk, and the trees are magnificent. I don't think I ever saw such Scotch firs anywhere; and there are noble beeches, and oaks, and elms, and sycamores. I made friends with them, each and all, when I was a boy. The house is not visible until you are close upon it. A low, long, very extensive, battlemented house; the centre more than two centuries old, the wings added, and added-to from that time until twenty years ago, when the admiral took a fit of building. It is a picturesque house, very roomy and convenient, with a noble pillared

entrance-hall, a fine staircase of black oak, carved and gilded, and a ceiling to correspond. Some handsome rooms lie on either side the hall, and there is a gallery, with some good pieces of statuary and a few pictures. I don't know much about pictures, but I believe Mrs. Drummond did, and she held these in great veneration. In front of the house is a wide flagged terrace with a stone balustrade; at the back a great conservatory stretches over two-thirds of the length of the house, and meets the long line of hothouses—which are, I believe, among the great sights of the county. This conservatory—I assure you, Sandilands, its roof-drapery of scarlet passion-flower might match with the splendid blooms in the botanical gardens here—opens on the park, and to the left lie the flower-gardens, surrounded by arched trellises of iron, all overgrown with roses and honeysuckles. A large space is laid down in the softest turf, which the admiral had kept as smooth and trim as ever his quarter-deck was; and there, again, are magnificent trees. There's a pinetum, with some marvellous conifera—I remember one shiny blue beauty in particular—and an old-fashioned English garden, which was my poor mother's especial delight when she was a girl, I believe."

"Lots of stabling, I suppose," suggested Esdaile, as Dunstan paused.

"Oh, yes. The admiral knew and cared nothing about horses; but Mrs. Drummond saw to that department—and, indeed, to most others."

"And a billiard-room?"

"Yes, there's a billiard-room. In fact, the place is very complete in every respect."

"Is there a good library?" asked John Sandilands.

"Yes, I believe it is a good one. There's a fine room, with heavily-carved bookcases, all wired in like meat-safes. And there are busts, and maps, and globes—the usual thing, you know. But I hated the library. I am not much of a reader at any time, and reading at Bevis had to be done

under penalties in the admiral's time. A huge catalogue, gorgeously bound, resided in an ebony stand on the centre table, and beside it lay a book, in which every one who took a volume out of the shelves had to enter its name and the number of the shelf it belonged to. There used to be very few gaps in the shelves. I am afraid I shall rather enjoy turning the library upside down; and I shall certainly burn the penal book."

"Oh no, you won't," said Sandilands, "the instinct of ownership will be too strong for you."

"I daresay you'll find room for alteration in other directions, however," said Esdaile, "and it will be rather amusing. Bevis is in a good neighbourhood, isn't it?"

"I don't think I quite know what a good neighbourhood means; but if it signifies lots of people to come and take tea on the lawn in the summer, I should say Bevis is that. Since the admiral's death, nobody has ever been asked inside the gates, I'm told."

"Dismal rather, for Mrs. Drummond, wasn't it?"

"Dismal, decidedly; but her own doing. She never cared for society, and only saw people because the admiral liked it."

"And so the poor old lady lived in solitary state in that big house?"

"Yes, I believe so; for I cannot imagine solitude being much enlivened by the presence of Miss Monro."

"Who is Miss Monro? You never mentioned her before."

"She was companion to Mrs. Drummond. Quite a lady, well educated, and all that kind of thing. She must have had a dull time of it, too. I never could make out that 'companion' business. Two women, with no interests and no associations in common, must bore one another so desperately, I should think."

"I wonder what has become of Miss Monro; whether the old lady has left her anything."

"Ah! that I can't tell," answered Dunstan, carelessly. "You know exactly as much and as little about Mrs.

Drummond's will as I do. I suppose, if Miss Monro continued with her, she has left her something."

"Miss Monro," said John Sandilands, in the tone of one puzzling out a recollection. "Miss Monro, I have some remembrance, some association with the name; I cannot recall it just now."

"She was a great favourite with the old lady, I understood," said Dunstan, "which says much for her. Mrs. Drummond must have been difficult to others as well as to me. A more perfect autocrat in a small way never existed, I should think, or a more obstinate woman."

"And yet you yourself are a living evidence of her weakness of purpose, or, at least, of her change of mind. There's no fault to be found in this instance with the exception that proves the rule."

"I have been thinking over it all," said Esdaile, "and, notwithstanding all you said to the contrary, I cannot help thinking the old lady's change of mind was not altogether sudden, or her own doing. Suppose the admiral left her a secret letter of instructions? You say she would not have had any such notion as trying the moral effect of a little disappointment on you, in the way of inspiring you with patience and self-reliance, and so forth; but perhaps the idea may have occurred to the admiral, and he may have enjoined it upon her. It would not have been inconsistent with her character to comply with his request under the circumstances, however little she might have approved of it, or expected from it, would it?"

Dunstan shook his head as he answered Esdaile, who had put this not very improbable supposition to him with eagerness.

"No," he said, "not a bit of it. She was asked whether my uncle had said or written anything about me, and she replied that he had not. This was immediately after his death; and she then intimated that her own arrangements were all completed, and no more to my advantage than the admiral's."

"There's no good in any more guessing about it," said Esdaile; "the great thing is that, however the impulse came to her, the old lady yielded to it. You have not had a very long spell of disappointment, have you?"

"No," assented Dunstan, with a smile full of content, "not very long, or, if all ends well now, very serious."

"Ends well!" said Sandilands; "begins well, you mean."

"Perhaps I do. The first thing is to see to the good beginning, and Esdaile will help me there, by coming home with me, and seeing me through it at Bevis."

"He has not looked about him much here," Sandilands said, discontentedly. He was not very well pleased, although he did not blame Dunstan.

"No, he hasn't," said Dunstan; "but the plantation won't run away, while I must, and he can come out again. Very likely I'll come too."

"Ah," said Sandilands, with a comically grim expression, "that's very likely, I should say!"

"I certainly shall come out again," said Esdaile.

The remainder of the morning was passed by the three young men in making the necessary arrangements, and writing letters. The Messageries boat would leave Colombo in three days; so they decided not to return to the plantation. Sir Wilfrid Esdaile's English servant was sent thither to bring the baggage to Kandy, and on the second day Sir Wilfrid Esdaile and Edward Dunstan bade adieu to John Sandilands, and took the train to Colombo. John had found time to write to Julia, and the letter, then in course of transmission to her, contained the following passage:

"If I could envy any man in the world—but, as you know, I cannot, for no other is so blest as I—I should envy Sir Wilfrid. He is the best fellow in the world, and the happiest. I wonder your cousin Laura did not fall in love with him; she might easily have done so, deeper than, by your account, I believe her to have fallen in love with Mr. Thornton. He is off, back again, to England now, with Dunstan, just because he asked him to go. He will see you,

as soon as possible after his arrival, and tell you of his satisfaction with everything here, his approbation of my way of doing business. I have made him aware of your interest in these matters—though it was a departure from our agreement—because he is thoroughly to be trusted, and it will be very nice for you, when he visits at Lowndes Street, to be able to speak freely to him. I wonder how Dunstan will get on. He takes his good fortune well and simply, forsaking his former groove with perfect facility; but I should think he never cared for it, and is not a man to be very much in earnest—not as you and I think of earnestness—about anything. I was quite pleased to find that Esdaile was acquainted with your people. He greatly admires Mrs. Thornton, but does not seem to know much about Mr. Thornton. You give me a charming impression of him; does he not find himself out of place among the Lowndes Street set? I can't judge, of course, knowing them only from hearsay, but I should think they are all fribbles compared with him. That your cousin Laura should have married such a man raises her in my estimation. I hope she will be very happy; as happy as you and I intend to be when the wheel of fortune has made a turn or two in our direction."

The fellow-travellers had only a few hours to spare at Colombo before the sailing of the Messageries boat, and they availed themselves of the time to purchase a number of articles which Sir Wilfrid's correspondents had begged him to bring back. They would be agreeably surprised at getting the baubles so much sooner than they expected, Sir Wilfrid remarked, observing, too, that Edward Dunstan was now much interested in the wares which he had previously regarded with indifference.

"I wonder whether women really believe that opals are unlucky," said Edward to his friend, as they were inspecting the jewel-trays of a certain trader of whom they had heard a good character.

"I'm sure they do," replied Sir Wilfrid, "even if they

don't acknowledge it—at least, under certain circumstances. I'm convinced, for instance, that no girl, unless she were detestably strong-minded, would really like an 'engaged' ring of opals."

"I dare say you're right." Dunstan replaced on the tray a beautiful scintillating stone he had been handling, and smiling significantly at his friend's penetration of his purpose, requested to be shown some cats'-eyes.

"Shall you do anything more in tortoiseshell?" asked Esdaile, who was laboriously consulting his note-book for particulars of a commission; "or are you satisfied with your inseparable dagger?"

Dunstan did not want anything more in tortoiseshell, and they shortly afterwards went on board the *Roxalane*.

The voyage was prosperous. Dunstan had no return of illness, and by the time they landed the last traces of debility left by the fever had disappeared. He was indeed thin and brown, but health had returned to him; the tonic had done its work. The plans of the friends were of delightful vagueness, the perfection of ease and liberty.

"London first, I suppose?" And the assent, "London first, of course!" had about arranged them.

A short stay at Havre sufficed for the purposes of Edward Dunstan, and it was on a beautiful autumnal morning—when the slight keenness in the air, the gentle touch of change on the trees, the paler blue in the cloud-flecked sky, were all full of unspeakable refreshment to the mind and body of the travellers from the garner-houses of the sun—that they stepped on board the steamer bound for Southampton. The sea was smooth and the boat was a good one; the "run" was unusually quick. The two young men were in the highest spirits. Dunstan had been talking to Sir Wilfrid about the extraordinary change that had befallen him, the absolute contrast between the circumstances under which he had last looked on the English coast and those under which he was now approaching it. Numbers of yachts and shipping of all sorts dotted the

fair expanse of Southampton Water, and the familiar scene ashore seemed to smile upon them as they came nearer and nearer to its crowding life and stir.

"Here we are," said Esdaile, as he took Dunstan by the arm, when the various horrid noises of disembarking were at their full height of discordance, "and there *they* are—England, home, and beauty!"

The customary crowd of spectators witnessed the arrivals of the day, and can rarely have beheld individuals less gratifying to their curiosity by a miserable aspect than the two friends, who intended to remain for that night at Radley's.

A little later, when the day was closing in, Sir Wilfrid Esdaile and Dunstan, looking out of a window of the brightly-lighted room on the ground-floor, in which they were about to dine, were enjoying the strangeness, and yet the familiarity, of the scene, when an open carriage drew up at the entrance, and a gentleman stepped out, followed by a lady, to whom he said, within the hearing of the two young men:

"It is late. I hope you have not taken cold?"

"Not in the least," the lady answered; and, passing on quickly, she entered the hotel.

At an exclamation from Dunstan, Sir Wilfrid Esdaile turned, and saw him with a bright, excited look in his face.

"That is she!" he said; "that is the girl I told you about—Miss Chumleigh. Only think of her being here! Who can she be with?"

He had left the window, and was half-way to the door, as if rushing off to make inquiry, when Esdaile checked him.

"Stop, stop," he said. "Take care what you are about. I—I am so sorry to tell you; so sorry you did not know. Miss Chumleigh is married, my dear fellow."

"Married! Laura Chumleigh married?"

"Yes, she is, indeed. How was it you did not know? We certainly talked of it at Kandy. Yes, she is married; and that's her husband with her—Mr. Thornton."

CHAPTER IX.

A RASH RESOLVE.

To the excitement and anger of Edward Dunstan's feelings in the first freshness of the discovery of Laura's falsehood, as he persisted in calling it, profound depression, with which his good-humoured but unsentimental companion found it hard to deal, succeeded. Any man might be excused for being awkward and at a loss under such circumstances, and Sir Wilfrid was not likely to feel less so than another. To him might have been applied Longfellow's lines :

> A youth, light-hearted and content,
> I wander through the world,

with the lucky difference that there was no association with his past which, on being evoked, had power to darken the face of the day to his eyes, and render his life valueless. Not for that reason was he disposed to make light of the blow that had fallen on Dunstan ; on the contrary, he had sufficient sympathy in his nature to render him pitiful to griefs he had never felt, and tolerant of temptations which had not assailed himself ; but he really did not know what to do with Dunstan, because he felt that the pithy

> If she be not fair to me,
> What care I how fair she be ?

which would, or he thought so, have been a powerful argument had the case been his own, would not have the slightest effect upon his friend.

Dunstan questioned Esdaile, concerning his knowledge of the matter, with reiteration, under which Esdaile's patience never once broke down ; and his excitement and suffering were keenly distressing to his friend, who imputed much of his want of self-command to the weakness of his nerves, resulting from recent illness. Dunstan had been so different that other time when badly hit ; he had taken the tremendous "facer" which Admiral Drummond's will had

dealt him with such pluck and coolness, that it was plain he had been terribly mauled by the fever, or he would never have given in like this. Thus thought Esdaile, with genuine but puzzled commiseration, as he strove to calm the excited and miserable young man, who walked up and down the room, asking rapid questions, hardly waiting for the replies, and rebelling with every fibre of his nature against the cynical cruelty of his fate.

"How it happened that I did not guess whom you were talking of, when you told me the story, I cannot imagine," said Esdaile, after Dunstan had impatiently, almost suspiciously, expressed his surprise that the truth had so long remained concealed; "for I saw a good deal of the Chumleighs, and just about that time, too, I fancy; but the truth never occurred to me. I'm sure I might have guessed that Lady Rosa would be the very woman to make you understand that any advances to her daughter under the circumstances would be useless, but somehow I never thought of her: and Miss Chumleigh—I must say it, my dear fellow—always seemed to me a young lady as fancy-free as one could see anywhere."

"I suppose she was just like the rest of them," said Dunstan, pausing for a moment in his troubled walk; "and yet—no, no, she must have been frightened into this."

"I don't know about frightened," said Esdaile, with a clear recollection of what Julia Carmichael had written to John Sandilands; "persuaded, perhaps. It looked like that."

"What looked like that?"

"Well, Miss Carmichael's account of the business. What a strange thing that Sandilands should never have mentioned it before you, but should have told me, whom he had no reason to suppose interested in it. Stop, though, I remember now, I saw the announcement of the marriage in one of the papers which was sent out to me—it must have been *The Morning Post*, I suppose—and I said something to

him. That led to our talking it over; you might as well have been in the room as not."

"Only I was not," said Dunstan bitterly "Only I was to remain a little longer in my fool's paradise; only the good fortune I was exulting in, for her sake, God knows, a thousand times more than for any other reason, was to be made a bitter disappointment by this deceitful hope. If I had known what Sandilands told you, I would never have come back to England! If I had even looked at the papers! But my mind was so full of what had happened, I looked at nothing, I thought of nothing, except the future that was never to be."

"You could not have avoided coming back to England my dear Dunstan," said Esdaile gravely, "and though it's very hard to be hit like this, just as you have got back, you must not let it floor you, you know. After all"—he hesitated a little, feeling that his purposed line of consolation, or at least suggestion, was a little dangerous—"she could not have been very much in earnest, or she would not have been, let us say, persuadable; and isn't it rather a one-sided kind of business, to marry a girl who might possibly change her mind? Don't get savage. I don't mean to find fault with her—girls are so bullied in all sorts of ways, especially girls with mothers like Lady Rosa—but you might think a little of that."

"Yes, I might. I might think outright what you are trying to insinuate to me, that I am better off without a wife who could be persuaded into giving me up because I had been done out of a fortune, and would presumably have married me, if the fortune hadn't come just a little too late! That is what you mean, isn't it?"

"Something like it, certainly," said Esdaile, who was much relieved by Dunstan's quick apprehension, hoping that the truth might come home to him in this way

"Not only like it—the thing itself. And I dare say you are right, of course you must be, there is only common

sense in that. A one-sided bargain, as you say; but still, Esdaile, it does not make it any more bearable to think of that. If she had waited for me, and we had been married, I should never have known that there was any changeableness in her."

The simplicity of this remark was very pathetic to Sir Wilfrid Esdaile's mind; he understood from it that Dunstan would be hard to cure of the wound so suddenly inflicted when hope was at its highest. And he also felt that he had nothing left to say.

"Who is this Mr. Thornton?" Dunstan asked. "I never met him—never saw him—that I know of."

Esdaile told him all he knew about Robert Thornton. It was not much, of his personal knowledge. Thornton was a good sort of fellow, he believed, not of their "world" or set at all, and not, Esdaile would have thought, in the least likely to cut out Dunstan with a girl, if she had had fair play. Very rich indeed, he believed, all ready money and no encumbrances, and, in fact, a great catch for Lady Rosa. As for the old Colonel, he probably had nothing at all to do with it; it was generally understood that the old Colonel had not much to do with anything.

"No," said Dunstan, "if we had only the Colonel to square, it would have come right enough. He would not have wanted to get rid of his daughter just when she was most beautiful and charming, and the best ornament of his home, as these manœuvring mothers do; but he had no voice in anything, and we should never have expected him to assert himself and bring her ladyship down on him. As a matter of fact, we did not take the Colonel into account one way or the other. I should not be surprised if he had never heard anything at all about me. At all events, he has heard only just what Lady Rosa chose to tell him."

"There isn't much good in discussing it, is there?" said Esdaile; "it is one of those things which it is quite as well not to investigate. I dare say you would find it a

case of mixed motives, after all, and no one quite so entirely to blame as might be supposed at first sight."

"Not investigate it?" exclaimed Dunstan, angrily. "What do you mean? What do you take me for? Do you imagine for a moment I mean to take it so coolly as all that? Have you forgotten that this means the utter ruin of me? that the good of all that has happened is taken completely out of it, and everything is far worse with me than before?"

"I can't answer all those questions at once, my dear fellow," said Esdaile; "but I really do not forget anything you told me, and I do not underrate the effect of this disappointment on you. I merely mean that it is one of those cases in which there is absolutely nothing to be done, and nothing to be known. You have got to grin and bear it."

"There's nothing to be done, I grant you," said Dunstan, more calmly, his momentary irritation giving way before the kindly sincerity of Esdaile's words and manner; "but that there is nothing to be known, I don't. I am not going to take this quietly, without at least knowing how it has befallen me. I will not be treated thus without insisting on an explanation."

"From whom? Do you suppose Lady Rosa Chumleigh will give you an explanation of her actions with respect to her daughter, if in reality it is she who has either coerced or persuaded her into this marriage?"

"I don't mean to ask her. Lady Rosa Chumleigh may say that she owes me no explanation, and have the letter of the law on her side; she and I were fair foes. Not so her daughter; she cannot refuse to tell me how it is I have been deceived and cheated."

Esdaile heard these angry words with considerable uneasiness. He had a notion, though he was little given to analysis, that Dunstan's was a rather weak character, and now he was about to receive practical proof that persons of weak character are not therefore easily managed.

"Those are very strong words," he said; "are you quite sure they are justifiable? You did not make it plain to me that the girl you spoke of—Miss Chumleigh, as I now know her to have been—had engaged herself to you."

"Nor had she, if by an engagement you mean a solemn promise, formally ratified, under penalties; but she knew I loved her, she led me to believe that she loved me, and if Admiral Drummond's will had not been what it was, she would have accepted me. If she did not make me a formal promise, when all had to be given up, that she would wait for me until better times, at least she made me an implied one; she knew in her heart that I went away trusting in that promise, and believing that she placed the same trust in me; and at least I will know whether this has been her own doing or another's. If she has been bullied into marrying this man, or if she has done it of her own free will, having preferred him to me, at least I am entitled to know which of the two explanations is the true one, and I am determined to know."

"And then?" asked Esdaile, quietly, "what difference can it make to you? Shall you be any the less parted? Will she be any the less lost to you?"

"No, certainly not. But cannot you understand, Esdaile, that there would be the satisfaction of knowing; that I should not be perpetually tormenting myself with questions and doubts; that I should have a better chance of getting over it, if she said to me, plainly: 'I made a mistake, and found it out. I preferred the other man.'"

"It's devoutly to be hoped she may have the sense to say just that, then, if he gets the chance of asking her, whether it's true or not," thought Esdaile.

"If I knew that she had been bullied into throwing me over, I don't know what I should do, I must pity her so much. I always did pity her; the life of a girl, with all the restrictions she must live under with a mercenary tyrant

like that woman, must strike any man as being an awful thing."

"Certainly," assented Esdaile, heartily, "even if he does not happen to care about the girl himself; but it must be the deuce and all if he does."

"Of course she must have been very cowardly, very weak, if it was so; but I suppose no man ever cared the less for a woman because she was capable of cowardice and weakness."

Esdaile shook his head. This silent sign of dissent passed unnoticed by Dunstan, who went on rather as if he were talking to himself than addressing his companion:

"And if this were so, if indeed she has been driven to this, how dexterously cruel fate has been to us both, for it must have been just about the time that Mrs. Drummond died. If she had but been true to me for a little, a very little longer! Mr. Thornton is, I suppose, much richer than I am—how strange the words sound in my own ears—but, as between two of us, she might have found courage enough to stand out for the man she certainly would have married not so long ago. That would not have been too much to expect from her. However, this is all idle; nothing remains for me but to find out the truth."

"I wish I could persuade you," said Esdaile, earnestly, "that the only wisdom in this matter is to do nothing, and say nothing, and think as little as possible. What is it you want to do?"

"I intend to see her, and learn the truth from her."

"You can't do it, Dunstan," said Esdaile, approaching Dunstan, and taking him by the arm. "You cannot do such a thing. Just think what might come of it. For one thing, you might get her into a dreadful row with her husband."

Dunstan winced at the word.

"That's not likely; the odds are he knows nothing about me—has never heard my name. I had disappeared from the scene long before he came on, remember; they are not likely to have talked of me to the favoured eligible.

Why should it make any disturbance between them that a gentleman of her acquaintance, newly returned from India, requests to be permitted to call on Mrs. Thornton?"

"Why should it? Well, Dunstan, I should have thought you could answer that question better than I. You know as much of the world as I know, and a great deal more of women and their ways. Who can tell what may or may not make a row between a man and his wife, especially if one knows nothing at all about the man? He may have a devil of a temper, in the first place, and then, you know, in this instance, there's the quite certain fact, whatever else there is, that she was in love with you, and that she either has or has not said anything to her husband about it; now, if she has not, you will put her into a false and painful position, and if she has, I need not dwell upon the unpleasantness to all concerned."

"And how do you think it could be pleasant to all concerned?"

"I don't think anything of the kind; but after all, in a matter like this, one can only do the best in one's power, and that by looking very carefully at it all round. If you do this, Dunstan, I think you will agree with me in the end, that, both for her sake and your own, you had better not meet Mrs. Thornton."

Dunstan made an evasive answer, and Esdaile perceived that he had not convinced him, and that, notwithstanding his own good-humoured patience with his friend, a disagreement between them might probably arise from any further discussion of the subject. Making a private resolution that he would get Dunstan off to London as early as possible on the following day, he occupied himself in writing letters, and left his friend to his meditations until it was time for them to separate for the night. Then he made a final allusion to the subject of their discussion.

"Don't think," he said, "I don't thoroughly feel for you because I have the coolness of a looker-on. I don't expect

you to have that—but you will be ever so glad hereafter, if you get the better of yourself now."

Dunstan said only, "Good-night, Esdaile," and then, while his friend went up to his room, he turned out of the hotel door, and walked away in the direction of the water.

His heart was full of bitterness and anger, which extended even beyond the cause of his desperate disappointment, to his not only guiltless but zealous friend. It was all very well for Esdaile to talk with such sound sense and cool philosophy; any one could do that. What did he know about it? He had never had a serious trouble in all his life, and though he was a very good fellow, the best of fellows, he was not an exception to the rule that men find other men's misfortunes easy to bear. Edward Dunstan, walking quickly under the serene night sky, with the sound of the sea in his ears and the long, low lines of the coast lights flickering before his eyes, heard nothing on that night—which he was never to forget—but the rage against his fate stirring in his own heart, and saw nothing but the vision he had cherished for so long mocking him with his disillusion.

A few hours ago, how happy he had been; how bright the world had seemed to him; life, how full of savour! He had said to himself many times since his good fortune, that it was well for him he had been so unhappy, well that disappointment had come to him in the first instance, for thus he had learned to appreciate the exquisite pleasure of contrast, to enjoy to the full that satisfaction which those on whom destiny has never frowned cannot derive from her smile. And now? There was a bitter derision in that smile, and Dunstan felt, quite honestly, though perhaps only passingly, that if he had heard of Laura Chumleigh's marriage while he was still a poor man serving with his regiment in India, he could have borne the blow infinitely better. It was the irony of it that now hurt him so terribly. And then, as memory has such power to torment, it tor-

mented him with the keenest remembrance of every look and word of her who was lost to him, of every hour he had passed in her society, of the wordless promises, the airy nothings, on which he had built so fair an edifice of hope. She had loved him, he swore to himself that she had loved him, and at least she had intended to be true to him. It was not all coquetry, it was not all the horrid contemptible falsehood that merely played with him, and then availed itself of his absence to achieve the purpose of mercenary ambition. No, Laura had been, as he said to Esdaile, weak and cowardly. She must avow it to him, she must tell him the truth; that, at least, she owed him. He did not confess to himself, while he dwelt in his thoughts on the confession to which he was determined, if possible, to force her, how large a part his longing to see her again had in this resolution; he persuaded himself that he could lose love in indignation, bury it utterly out of sight in the anger and the condemnation that he heaped upon her, even when he excused her from the blame of complete falsehood; but it was not lost, it was not buried, it was with him, living and strong, and it closed his ears to Esdaile's reasonings, and supplied the fallacious motives with which he justified his obstinacy to himself.

He had taken no heed of time during his walk, and stopping at last to look at his watch by the light of a cresset which marked some mending operations on the road, he found that it was late. He retraced his steps to the hotel, without having decided upon how he should frame the message which was to procure him an interview with Mrs. Thornton, and, on entering the hall, he encountered two persons within a few steps of the door. One of these was a man of a little over thirty years of age, of gentlemanly appearance, but with nothing distinguished or remarkable about him except indeed the full and musical tone of his voice, as he addressed his companion, a smart, nautical-looking young man, who held an unmistakably sea-going

cap in his hand, though his light overcoat concealed his attire.

"Ten o'clock sharp, then," the elder gentleman was saying, as Dunstan came in at the door; "you will pick me up here."

"All right, sir. Mrs. Thornton coming aboard?"

"Not to-morrow. She cannot be ready so soon."

Dunstan passed them and went into the room in which he and Esdaile had dined, leaving the door open. Presently Mr. Thornton passed the open door, and, after pausing a moment to look at the barometer on the opposite wall, he walked slowly upstairs.

So this was the man of whom Dunstan had caught a glimpse as he stood by the carriage; this was Laura Chumleigh's husband. Dunstan was incapable of the vulgar spite which might have induced a meaner man to sneer at a successful rival, and to discover that he was elderly and ill-favoured. He hated the man, no doubt, or, at least, he honestly believed that he hated him; but he could not say to himself that there was anything contemptible in the aspect of the rich "nobody" who had won the prize upon which Dunstan's own heart had been so vainly set. He even found himself wondering vaguely whether Thornton was a good sort of fellow, and thinking that, if he were not, he must belie his looks.

When Esdaile and Dunstan met on the following morning, at breakfast, Dunstan was the first to refer to their conversation of the previous night, and he did so without any embarrassment.

"I am of the same mind," he said, "and I have ascertained that I shall be able to have my request for an interview conveyed to her, without the risk of bringing about anything unpleasant, for Mr. Thornton is going out somewhere—to some ship or yacht."

"His own, no doubt; he has a very fine yacht, the *Firefly*, here, in Southampton Water."

"Ah, the *Firefly!* That was Miss Chumleigh's pet name; the Colonel always called her by it." He tried to speak lightly, but he winced again. "Mr. Thornton is going aboard with a man who was here last night—his skipper, very likely—at ten o'clock. I heard him make the appointment, and say that she would not be ready to go with him. We shall see him start from the window here, and shortly afterwards I will send up my card and ask her to see me."

Esdaile did not like it, and his looks said so very plainly; but he could do nothing. He secretly hoped that Mrs. Thornton would decline to see Dunstan; but, remembering his friend's admission that she was cowardly and weak, he thought this was hardly likely.

"I suppose you don't see any harm in the proceeding?" Dunstan added, in a slightly aggressive tone.

"No harm, precisely; but it might be awkward if you gave it the look of watching Thornton out of the way. However, she will know best the sort of man she has to deal with, and will keep as clear of a scrape as she can under the circumstances."

At ten o'clock precisely Mr. Thornton was standing in the hall, again examining the barometer; and in a minute or two he was joined by his companion of the previous evening. Immediately afterwards they left the hotel.

"Now," said Dunstan, as he took a card out of his pocket-book

"Stay a minute," said Esdaile. "You must really let me do a little bit of acting here. We must account for knowing that Mrs. Thornton is in the house."

He rang the bell, and put a question to the waiter.

"That gentleman just gone out is Mr. Thornton, the owner of the *Firefly*, is he not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is Mrs. Thornton here with him, or is she on board the yacht?"

"Mrs. Thornton is here, sir."

"You're in luck," turning to Dunstan. "You really have stumbled on your friends. I thought you could not be mistaken. Do you happen to know when Mr. Thornton will be in?"

"Not till late, sir. Going for a sail, sir."

"That's unlucky," again turning to Dunstan, "as we must be off to-day. You had better ask when Mrs. Thornton can see you."

Dunstan wrote a line on his card, and directed the waiter to send it at once to Mrs. Thornton. The man left the room, and during his absence, which lasted fully ten minutes, Esdaile and Dunstan did not exchange a word.

The man returned at length with a verbal message. Mrs. Thornton would be happy to see the gentleman from India in half-an-hour.

CHAPTER X.

FOOLS' PARADISE.

"By the time she finds out what has happened she won't care a straw." Such was the easy and satisfying conclusion at which Lady Rosa Chumleigh arrived on her daughter's wedding-day, when she had succeeded in preventing her from learning the facts that had reversed Captain Dunstan's ineligibility. How much truth was there in that conclusion? How much knowledge of her daughter's real nature did it reveal? Judging from Laura's general demeanour, Lady Rosa might have been pronounced perfectly right, and an admirable judge of character. This, however, was not altogether the case; other influences besides the shallowness of Laura's own feelings and the beneficent action of custom, on which her mother had reckoned, had induced her to take things quietly, and to conform with a good grace to the novel circumstances in which her marriage with Robert Thornton had placed her.

Of course her ignorance of the death of Mrs. Drummond, and Edward Dunstan's succession to the inheritance of which he had been deprived by the admiral's will, did not last long. Almost immediately after her return from Scotland, Mrs. Thornton heard all about the matter. It would have been impossible that she could have heard of Edward Dunstan's too long-delayed good fortune without a certain shock of regret —without a certain indulgence in the thought of "the might have been"—but the effect of the ironical action of fate in the matter upon her was divided from identity with its effect upon him by all the distance that separates a passion from a preference, a purpose from a fancy, and a defined life from a desultory one.

The intelligence was not conveyed to Laura in her husband's presence, and this she regarded as very fortunate —not so much for her own sake as for his; not because she was afraid of him—though she was, just a little—but because she was learning to recognise and respect in him something of intensity and candour, which was not in herself, and which she would not wound with intention. She was glad to have time to get over the first impression before she met her husband again, and then she began to feel a little surprised at the comparative ease with which she had surmounted that first impression. If Robert Thornton had been a different kind of man, not so serious about things, and not so very, very much devoted to her, and of such strangely romantic notions, she would not have minded telling him, and the proceeding would have had its advantages, because it would have made him understand Lady Rosa thoroughly, and rendered things easier for the future; but, Robert Thornton being what he was, it would not do.

Laura's natural cleverness comprised the gift of caution, and the exigencies of her life under her mother's *régime* had cultivated that gift, so that even with Julia Carmichael she was not completely thrown off her guard. The seemingly unnatural circumstance that the two girls should have lived

so long in the same house on perfectly affectionate terms, and that Julia should have known nothing whatever of the episode of Edward Dunstan's hopes and disappointment, is easily explicable. Lady Rosa had said, "I won't have this nonsense talked about to any one ; I don't choose Julia to know that such folly was ever contemplated;" and Laura had not dared to disobey her. Neither was she, indeed, inclined to do so, for Laura had no gushingness about her. When the marriage between herself and Mr. Thornton was arranged, she was very glad that the position had not been complicated by the necessity for any explanations to Julia, for she felt uncomfortably certain that, if called for, they must have assumed a palliative and exculpatory form.

Julia, if placed in Laura's circumstances, would unquestionably have shown fight. She might, indeed, have been prevented from marrying the man she loved because he was poor, if she had loved a man who could have been persuaded to withdraw his suit, as Edward Dunstan had been persuaded, but her persuadableness would have stopped there ; she could never have been induced to marry a man whom she did not love. This Laura felt so strongly that, laying, as she did, great store by Julia's affection, she was glad nothing had tempted her to disregard her mother's command, and to render herself suspect in Julia's eyes for the sake of present sympathy.

The first feelings with which Laura had learned that, at the very time when she had given herself to another, Edward Dunstan had realised all the hopes that had been dashed to the ground at Admiral Drummond's death, were succeeded by speculation upon the sentiments of her father and mother on the occasion.

"Poor papa," thought Laura, as she dried the tears that had fallen, in no great abundance, from her eyes, "would have been quite content with him as he was ; and I am sure he felt very sorry for both of us. He would be sorry for Mr. Thornton, too, if he thought I should fret very much

about it. Poor papa! And he told me he hoped I should be a good wife, and never give Mr. Thornton cause to regret that he had married me; and I promised him that I never would, if it were only for papa's sake. But mamma! I wonder whether she will speak of him to me. I wonder how and when she heard about it, and what she thought. I wonder was she at all sorry for me, or did she regret that she had not let me have a little more time. I should think she must have felt a little, for, after all, my marriage was only a risk and a chance then; no one could have known how good Mr. Thornton would be to me."

Poor "Mr. Thornton!" If he could have known that his wife called him by that formal name even in her thoughts! If he could have known that gratitude of a tepid kind was the strongest sentiment he had as yet awakened in the heart he tried so hard and so persistently to win!

A change came over Laura's mind, however, when she and Julia Carmichael met for the first time after Laura's marriage, and Julia related to her the incident of *The Morning Post*. It was at Hunsford, where the newly-married pair proposed to make a brief stay. The reception of Laura and her husband by Lady Rosa and the Colonel had been characteristic. Lady Rosa patronised her son-in-law, and left Laura to the society of her father and her cousin—an arrangement which suited all parties except Mr. Thornton. He was an amiable man, and he had a very proper sense of the claims of his wife's parents upon him; but he disliked Lady Rosa, while he liked the Colonel, and could have found a degree of pleasure in his company which was not altogether explicable, seeing that Colonel Chumleigh and himself had no pursuits or tastes in common—except Laura. In that exception was the explanation of Mr. Thornton's liking for his father-in-law. He knew very well that he owed Lady Rosa's patronage to his fortune; he knew that he owed the Colonel's kindliness to the Colonel's belief that Laura's happiness was safe and assured in his hands.

Laura had arrived at Hunsford in a mutinous mood; arising partly from the girlish impulse to display and assert her independence, and to show her tyrannical mother how completely she was her own mistress, and "spoiled" by Mr. Thornton, and partly from the development of her intelligence, which had taught her to estimate with undesirable exactness, Lady Rosa's absolute heartlessness in all the transactions in which Laura had been concerned. She was looking brilliantly pretty—she was in high spirits, and she certainly did "show off" a little, to the amusement of Julia, and the surprise of Mr. Thornton, who had never before seen any self-assertion about Laura. Lady Rosa, however, was perfectly equal to the occasion, and she put Laura in her place, as she afterwards expressed it, with such promptitude that Laura went meekly to the rooms appropriated to her, with as thorough a sense of being snubbed as she had ever experienced in her life.

Julia accompanied her, and when the cousins were alone they both laughed.

"It won't do, Laura," said Julia. "And you had better take care, or you'll find yourself dining at the side-table, like the French duchess-elect, who didn't curtsey low enough to her mamma. Lady Rosa is of opinion that 'my daughter's my daughter all the days of her life.' Her 'don't litter the room, my dear, with your things; keep your bonnet on until you go upstairs,' was quite in the old style."

"It was indeed," said Laura, ruefully. "But then, she added, cheering up, "so was papa quite in the old style, and the dogs, and you, Julia. And I have made up my mind not to mind mamma."

It was not until late in the evening that Julia had an opportunity of telling Laura about the little incident that had puzzled her so much. The cousins were in Laura's room, from whose bow-window, luxuriantly adorned with climbing hop and vine, they could trace the course of the Colonel and Mr. Thornton, as they walked to and fro in the shrubbery, by the dull specks of fire emitted by their respec-

tive cigars. Julia was brushing Laura's hair—a proceeding which was also quite in the old style, reminding the girls of those late talks which Lady Rosa had so often interrupted by her domiciliary visits.

"It was so very odd," said Julia, "so mysterious altogether, that I have been longing to find out about it. I could not have explained it in writing, and so I just captured the newspaper, and put it away until I could show it to you. Of course I did not ask my uncle a question; it would only have disturbed him, and it is so awkward to have overheard anything that's not intended for one. I'll show it to you in a minute, when I've rolled up your hair."

Then she produced the copy of *The Morning Post*, and the two bright heads bent themselves over it. Laura had suspected from the first words of Julia's communication what it was that she should find in the newspaper, and she had betrayed nothing beyond curiosity.

"The paper was turned up so, and this was the page she pointed to," said Julia. Laura had already recognised the paragraph that contained the account of the death of Mrs. Drummond of Bevis, and the accession of her late husband's nephew to the estate. She said, very calmly:

"That must be the paragraph mamma pointed out to papa."

"That! But what has that to do with you? Why should Lady Rosa have hidden it from you? What could it have had to do with your marriage?"

"Nothing, in reality, but I dare say mamma thought it might have upset me. I never told you, dear Julia, because she forbade me, but this Captain Dunstan cared for me at one time, and—and it might have come to something only that Admiral Drummond left all his property to his wife instead of to Captain Dunstan, and so, of course, he could not marry."

Julia said nothing whatever when her cousin paused; she was literally too much astonished to speak.

"It was not very wise of mamma," Laura resumed, with

a little hurry in her tone—"to conceal this from me; she ought to have known that it would not have made any difference—then."

"But, Laura," said Julia, slowly, and with a steady look into her cousin's face, "did you care for Captain Dunstan? Would you have married him, if you had been allowed?"

"As things were?" asked Laura, with a blush, "well, perhaps not. At all events, it is better not to talk about it now, isn't it? No good can come of discussing it. I am very glad you told me, because it was not with my wish that there ever was any secret about it between you and me; but we had much better leave it there now."

Julia, though feeling that very little of the secret had been revealed, even now, could only assent. She folded up the newspaper, put it in her pocket, and was going to take leave of Laura for the night when a sudden remembrance struck her:

"Laura," she said, "this Captain Dunstan is the person whom Sir Wilfrid Esdaile expected to meet at Ceylon; I know that from John's last letter. He is coming home; you will see him. Tell me only one thing; shall you mind it?"

Anxiety, even fear, were in Julia's mind as she asked this question, and they expressed themselves in her voice. Laura was not insensible to them, or to the difference between her cousin's way of thinking and her own.

"Don't be afraid," she said, taking Julia's hand tenderly, and looking up in the face that was bent over her with true solicitude; "I don't think I shall mind very much. When I heard this, I knew of course that he would come home and that we might meet. But he knows about my marriage, by this time, and he will not mind much either, I dare say. Nothing very tragical ever happens nowadays, you know"—and here Laura laughed, an unreal little laugh. "I dare say Captain Dunstan and I shall not meet for a long time, ever, and perhaps he'll be married by that time."

"Nothing very tragical ever happens nowadays" — Julia's thoughts repeated Laura's words—"it seems to me that something very tragical has happened already."

"May I ask you just one thing more," Julia said, "and then I will never mention the subject again, if you like. Does Mr. Thornton know?"

"He does not."

"Oh, Laura! That is very wrong. And it is very unsafe."

"My dear Julia, excuse me if I differ with you. You cannot possibly know Mr. Thornton's disposition so well as I do, and I am sure he had better never hear anything at all about it. Mamma would not allow me to say anything to him before we married, and I certainly shall not trouble his mind now."

"I suppose you know best, Laura; but it seems wrong to me."

At this moment the cousins heard Mr. Thornton's step in the adjoining dressing-room, and Julia, much to Laura's relief, took leave of her for the night.

It seemed very wrong to Julia Carmichael, who had already had her doubts about the safety, and the wisdom, and indeed the honesty of Laura's conduct in marrying, with so little love in her heart for the man with whom she had undertaken to pass and to share all her life; doubts which had become more and more defined as Laura's letters reached her, all lacking the tone which Julia's own feelings taught her to miss. And now, to discover that Laura had loved another—for Julia did not doubt that, though her direct question had not been answered, but eluded—had relinquished him because he was poor, and had allowed her husband, if not to believe that he was loved—she did not think Mr. Thornton could be mistaken on that point—at least to believe that she was quite fancy free, was a great blow to her. Her different bringing up, and her natural rectitude of mind, rendered Julia keenly sensitive to the

want of principle and the essential coarseness which characterised so many of the lives and the deeds of the people who formed the society among which her uncle and aunt moved; but hitherto she had supposed her own relations to be actuated by motives a little superior to those which she plainly perceived to be at work around her. To her, the discovery of cold calculation, fickleness, and the absence of anything like an appreciation of the sacredness of marriage, was a revelation of profound immorality. She did not, indeed, extend the full blame of it to her uncle, because she was accustomed to think of him as lacking a will of his own, and ruled by Lady Rosa; still, in so extreme a case, she could not but despise him. This had constituted, Julia thought sadly, a very bad beginning; how would things go on, and how would they end? She could only hope that Laura and Captain Dunstan might not meet; and she could not help wondering a little whether Captain Dunstan had been a very devoted lover, like Mr. Thornton, or had taken his fate with anything like the composure which she imputed to Laura.

And then Julia was led by her reflections, as indeed often happened, to contemplate her own good fortune, her own security, her own exceeding happiness in being the chosen of her true and brave lover. She would have been ready at any time to obey the injunction—

> Down upon your knees,
> And thank Heaven, fasting, for a good's man's love—

her attitude of mind was always grateful for so immense a boon; but, as Julia said her prayers that night, and afterwards looked at the little packet of her lover's letters which rested always under her pillow, there was additional fervour in her thankfulness, lent by the feeling of safety, amid surroundings full of insecurity.

Lady Rosa Chumleigh and her daughter had not had much to say to one another at any time, and their mutual communicativeness was not increased by Laura's marriage.

Laura had plenty to say to her father, and the Colonel accepted her gay and pretty talkativeness as a satisfactory proof that all was right with her. He would have liked her to tell him that she was very "happy," rather than that she was very "lucky;" for Laura still used the phrase that had jarred upon her father's ear on the eve of her wedding-day, and he would have liked to find her more actively and accurately interested in her husband's affairs and pursuits; but Colonel Chumleigh was accustomed to take his happiness in a cracked and flawed condition, and never quarrelled with anything short of utter smash. The more he saw of Robert Thornton, the more he liked him, and the deeper became his sense of his daughter's good fortune. Thornton's practical good sense and energy were perhaps rather oppressive to the Colonel individually. He was dimly aware that many things might be much better managed at Hunsford than they were, and he entirely acquiesced in the suggestions of his son-in-law as the two walked round the small domain; but he felt at the same time that they never would be acted on. To see that a thing was wrong and to set it right with the least possible delay, was Robert Thornton's way; to see that a thing was wrong, to "mention it" to Lady Rosa, and, if his observation remained unnoticed, to forget the grievance as soon and as completely as possible, was the Colonel's way.

"Thornton is wonderfully clever," Laura's father said, more than once, admiringly, to Laura, and she answered each time, carelessly: "Oh yes, he is, indeed!" But the new and admired son-in-law was not clever enough to change the order of things at Hunsford, and he had little satisfaction in being there beyond that which he derived from the contemplation of Laura's pleasure in the society of her father and her cousin. If he had somewhat of the feeling of an outsider himself, he was generous enough not to mind it; between him and his young wife there was less of the strangeness—slight, but distinct—that had troubled

him vaguely, now that they were in a place and among people familiar to her. If that strangeness should be conquered, if the something that was wanting in Laura's looks and tones when they were addressed to him, should be supplied by her natural pleasure in returning for a little while to her old home, he would be more than satisfied to endure the rudeness of Lady Rosa, and the dulness of the Colonel. There was such a good time coming! A time of freedom and delight upon the sea; of dear companionship, and the communion with the great deep, which he had always loved; a time when he should win all his wife's mind and heart, and make her see the beauty and the meaning of the world, as he had learned to see them, dwarfing the petty aims and interests among which she had hitherto lived.

Robert Thornton had not, as yet, persuaded himself that he derived from his marriage the perfect happiness which the winning of Laura was to have brought with it; but he fully believed it was to come, and he explained to himself that it was delayed only because the winning of Laura was not absolutely complete. She was his wife, his pride, his lady-love; but not yet his true and perfect companion, the other half of himself, as in his romantic and thorough way of thinking and feeling he held she should be. This would come when she should love him as he loved her, when the girl should have grown into the woman; when the half-childish feeling on her part that he was "very kind to her," and "so nice about things," whose frequent expression jarred upon him, should have passed away into the peaceful equality and entire oneness of a perfect union. Laura's brightness and grace had extraordinary charms for her husband; he was never disturbed by one small or jealous thought as she lavished them on all around her; the love she so little comprehended was all too noble for such pitifulness as this. But, sometimes, he wished that he had known more of her own particular world, had seen and heard more of the subjects that interested her, and so

escaped a certain sense of his own stupidity and slowness which troubled him. It provoked him that he should have to ask her to explain some allusion which amused her, or that he should feel at a loss when she was talking gaily with the people whom Lady Rosa invited to meet them at Hunsford, with a discreet sense of the awkwardness of a family party where one of its members is a stranger. All this, however, was only for a little while, and, in the meantime, it never occurred to Robert Thornton that Laura was just as little acquainted with his particular world, just as unfamiliar with his tastes and interests; but that she did not regret this unfamiliarity, had no wish to repair it, in fact, did not think about it at all.

If ever there was love all made of humbleness and of observance, it was the love of Robert Thornton for his young wife; and his innermost misgiving, hearkened to most unwillingly, never whispered to him anything more formidable than that if, indeed, all her heart were not yet his, it was only because its strongest and deepest feelings were still sleeping. In time, and only a little time, their slumber would yield to his wooing voice, his tender and earnest touch; and then, then the dream of his lonely, pure, reticent, imaginative life would be fully realised, the satisfaction of his heart would be as complete as the fascination of his fancy

He was a sad blunderer in some ways; he knew, and sometimes he feared, that Laura's girlish susceptibility, that perfectly innocent vanity which was one of her charms, and which, as regarded himself, he liked to believe to be a deeper feeling, was hurt by his thick-headed want of perception. She would receive a dozen compliments on her dress, for instance, and receive them with such sparkling smiles as proved the pleasure they gave her; and he, who had seen the "lovely" gown or the "delicious" wreath before any one else, on whose arm she had come floating down the staircase to delight the eyes of the assembled

guests, would have been perfectly unconscious that she had not worn the lovely gown or delicious wreath a dozen times.

On the third day of their stay at Hunsford, Robert Thornton, coming into the drawing-room rather late, saw Laura handling, with many expressions of admiration, a great bunch of Cape jessamine. He drew near, and remarked on the beauty of the blossoms.

"Yes," said Laura, "they are my favourite flowers, and Captain King remembered about them. He got them at Dane Vale this afternoon."

Dane Vale was a show-place in the neighbourhood, and the party from Hunsford had gone there that day.

Robert said, very low, and bending over the flowers:

"It was stupid of me to forget that you had wished for some Cape jessamine; when we were there to-day, I might as well have thought of it as Captain King."

Laura smiled, her frankest smile, as she answered:

"Oh, it does not matter, so as I've got the flowers."

The next moment dinner was announced. Julia Carmichael went in that day with Mr. Thornton, and found him an unusually silent companion. She had observed the foregoing little incident, and she wondered whether her cousin's husband, who certainly did not shine in society, and was a bad hand at *petits soins*, was inclined to be jealous? It looked like it; and if this were so, how would he take it, if fate should ever throw Edward Dunstan in Laura's path again, and Robert Thornton come to know about him? Julia was mistaken; there was not any jealousy in Mr. Thornton's meditations upon an incident apparently too trifling to be worth a thought; there was only vexation with himself.

The effect upon Laura of her visit to Hunsford was to deepen her feelings towards her husband on the side concerning which he was the least solicitous. She did feel immensely indebted to him for having taken her away; she took real pleasure in contrasting her present independence

with her former thraldom ; she fully enjoyed every point and item of the contrast. It could not fail to occur to her that all this might have been achieved equally by her marriage with Edward Dunstan, if she had only been allowed to wait a little while ; and she knew very well—though she loyally strove, being a good girl acccording to her lights, not to think about it—that she and Dunstan would have suited one another better than did she and Mr. Thornton. The latter was the best and kindest fellow in all the world, but it was uphill work ; she could not deny that, and the very best thing that could have happened was her visit to Hunsford, it made her so thoroughly thankful for her escape.

"The fact is," Laura had said to herself, on the very day of the incident of the Cape jessamine, "I am a common-place, ordinary person, and I don't want anything out of the common in the way of sentiment ; I suppose that must be it. And he was just the same ; he liked the kind of life and amusements, and the every-day goings-on that I liked, just the same as all the rest of the world, and so we should have got on splendidly together. But Mr. Thornton is a superior person ; he really is much better, and cleverer, and more serious than I or—he—or, indeed, any one, and that makes him a little—what is it ?—tiresome, I suppose I must call it, for I don't know any other word that says exactly what I mean. However, I must not think of him now, and I am bound to hope he is not thinking of me. The old lady in Scotland was perfectly right. Mr. Thornton is much too good for me, even much too good *to* me ; she was not more alive to that than I am now. I wonder, when we have done with the yachting, and come to town, whether he will be much in the house, or will find amusements out of doors, like other men."

Laura would have been genuinely shocked if any one could have divined her thoughts and interpreted them, thus : "The truth is, your husband adores and bores you."

Nevertheless, this was true, and Laura might have cleared the easy barrier between feeling vaguely that it was true, and admitting that she felt it, but for the refresher administered to her memory by her visit to Hunsford. How glad she was to think that Julia would not have very much more of Lady Rosa, and of the sort of turmoil which the "certain uncertainty" of her temper kept the house in, though Julia minded it much less than she did. Next to getting away for a walk, or a ride, with her father, Laura most enjoyed talking with Julia over her future prospects, and planning wedding presents on a scale which made Julia laugh.

"But, Julia," Laura said gravely, when her cousin bade her remember that there was some little difference between the requirements of the wife of a man in Mr. Thornton's position and those of the wife of a man in John Sandilands', "that is all nonsense. Whatever I have for myself I should like you to have, and I am sure Mr. Thornton would wish the same."

"So am I," said Julia, "whether he should be of your way of thinking in the matter, or of mine; for he always wishes the same, does he not? Ah, I shall not have such a model husband as yours, Laura. I never saw a man so desperately in love in my life. And people say that kind of thing does not survive matrimony. However, I am happy to say I never believed them."

"Well, I don't know," said Laura slowly. "It depends, I suppose, upon people's dispositions. I mean whether they like romance, you know. Mr. Thornton is worse, if anything."

"Worse?"

"Oh, how stupid of me," Laura laughed, "I mean more silly about me, always thinking about me—you know the kind of thing; and, as I am not at all romantic, I don't think I like it particularly. Of course he is excessively kind and nice to me, only—only——"

"Only he's too much in love with you. I suspected as much. Never mind; if there's any truth in what people who know the world tell us, that's a state of things that can't last. You will always have the best of husbands, you know, even if he leaves off being your lover."

"She did not care for him before," thought Julia sadly, after this little bit of confidential talk, "and he has not been able to make her care for him since. Poor fellow!"

"How quick and clever Julia is," thought Laura, "though she is so romantic about herself and her John. I am sure I hope she is right. It will be so much pleasanter when Mr. Thornton leaves off being in love with me; and it can't last for ever." Laura was brighter, happier, more deserving of her father's pet name than ever, after this happy thought came to her, and in radiant looks and the highest spirits she left Hunsford with her husband for Southampton.

CHAPTER XI.

HE AND SHE.

EXACTLY at the appointed moment Edward Dunstan presented himself at the door of Mrs. Thornton's sitting-room, and was admitted. He had passed the interval between the receipt of Laura's message and that moment in a state of mind which seemed to reproduce all the varieties of feeling he had experienced since Esdaile's words had knocked over his hopes, like a second Alnaschar's basket, strewing the fragments around him, with a separate ray of mocking brightness shining at him from each bit of the derisive ruin. Anger, resentment, jealousy; the rebellion against fate that is one of the most terrible pangs we have to suffer, because it is so useless; scorn of the fickleness of the woman he loved, and of himself in that he had trusted that light and fickle nature; stronger than all, turning up in the turmoil oftener than all—as we may note some particular fragment

of the waste and ruin of a wreck reappearing in the swirl of the waves—the bitterness of disappointment spoiling the taste of his good fortune. Now, as he stood for a moment, divided only by the door from her presence, the vision of the last time he had seen her came before him more vividly than during all the days and months in which it had been his constant companion. For that one moment, the truth he had been raging at for so many hours seemed suddenly to have become impossible. It could not be that in another minute he should see Laura, the wife of another man; no, it could not be.

The room was a long one, with a wide window commanding the sea, at the farthest end; and there Mrs. Thornton was seated; so that, when the door closed behind him, Edward Dunstan had to walk up the length of the room towards the well-remembered figure, the same, yet so different. Before he had reached the window, the thing which, only a minute before, had seemed so impossible to him, became of all facts the most real and evident. And yet Laura had merely said, "How do you do, Captain Dunstan?" and held out her hand. He could not take it; he drew back one step, and Laura, without any embarrassment, substituted for the proffered salutation a gesture which invited him to be seated. What had become of his anger, and his resolution to express it? He could not even ask himself that question in his thoughts, though he put it to himself afterwards; everything was set aside for the moment by the impression which Laura's look and manner produced upon him. In silence he took the chair she pointed to.

Was the great defeat she had already inflicted upon him to be followed up by a total rout? He knew it had been her own doing now. The self-possessed young woman, graceful, richly-dressed, mistress of herself and the position, who thus received the man whose life she had spoiled, was not the timid girl from whom he had parted, capable of

only a feeble hint of partisanship towards her father, and the almost unresisting victim of her mother's temper. The fair face was unchanged, but he hardly saw its rich, dark, sparkling beauty, so startled was he by the revelation of change of another kind in Laura. Edward Dunstan was right; there was a great alteration in her, but he antedated and misinterpreted it.

"You have only just returned, I believe," Mrs. Thornton said, ignoring his silence and his embarrassment, but perfectly alive to the alteration in his appearance, and reading correctly the tale of illness and mental suffering in his face.

"I have only just returned," said Dunstan, at length mastering himself; "I reached England yesterday. Last evening I saw you arrive here, and I have come to——"

"To see an old friend, who is very happy to welcome you back to England."

He was quick enough to understand the meaning of her tone, although he was far from fathoming its motive. He knew that she intended to convey to him that the past was a sealed book, and that she had admitted him as a visitor, probably because that was a less embarrassing course than a refusal to see him would have been. He had no means of estimating either what the interview cost her, in regret and self-restraint, or the advantage afforded her by preparation for the possibility of such an interview. He believed her to be merely cold and callous; he discarded pity for the weakness and cowardice which he had admitted as belonging to her character, ceasing to believe that she had been actuated by these only; he believed now that it had been her own doing, her own fault, and though he suffered no less keenly than before, this new phase of feeling made him as hard and as determined as Laura herself. At least she should know that he thoroughly despised her. Did he? Was it contempt that was throbbing so painfully in his heart and brain? He believed that it was, and it was better he should so believe.

"No," he answered, "not altogether for that purpose. I have come to ask you for an explanation which I have a right to expect. Remembering how you and I parted, you cannot deny that you owe me, at least, an explanation of your conduct. You have treated me very ill."

"I do not think you are wise in demanding an explanation," said Mrs. Thornton, gently, "and if you persist in doing so, we cannot for the future meet as friends."

"I don't care about that. We could not meet as friends in any case; I have no fancy for shams of that kind. There was no such pretence between us when we parted; there never can be any such pretence on my side."

"Then you have done very wrong in asking me to see you. If you and I are not to meet as friends, we cannot meet at all. You can hardly wish for a scene of useless recrimination, and I, most undoubtedly, shall not submit to it."

Dunstan looked at her with curiosity, with perhaps just a shade of insolence, and rose.

"You dismiss me summarily, Mrs. Thornton," he said, "but in that you only exercise your woman's privilege of injustice. I have, of course, no redress, but you make it plain to me that you, on your side, have no excuse. I must obey you, and ask no explanation; but at least you will have to remember in the midst of your own happiness that you have ruined mine. I would rather not think so badly of you even yet, as to believe that you will enjoy the knowledge. I can declare, with a safe conscience, that my truth to you never wavered, and that all the worth to me of my good fortune was that it set me free to seek, or, as I thought like a fool, to claim you. I hurried back to England when the news of it reached me, full of the hope which you allowed me to cherish, to find, only yesterday, that I was too late."

"Did you not know until yesterday that I——" she paused, and this first sign of weakness gave him an advantage. If she would parley with him at all, she was aban-

doning the line she had in the first instance taken up. As for her, this was a new view of the matter ; she understood that the man before her was suffering under a freshly inflicted shock ; this was not the fulfilment of a deliberately-formed purpose, on which he had been brooding during a long journey ; there was not so much need as she had thought for being on her guard with him, and against herself.

"I did not know until yesterday that you had married another man. Until I saw you alight at the door of this place, I believed you to be Laura Chumleigh still ; the girl whom I loved, and to whom I was hastening. It would have been more merciful to have sent me some warning—but you did not care, you did not care!" He turned from her, and began to walk to and fro. Mrs. Thornton's hand, hidden by a fold of her gown, closed tightly upon the arm of her chair.

"I never thought of this," she said. "It never occurred to me but that you would know about me, if only from the newspapers, as I learned about you."

His restless steps had borne him away from her at that moment, or, in spite of her self-command, he would have seen that she was deeply moved. Had not she also learned the news of Dunstan too late ?

"I am sorry that it has so chanced—that at least, was not my fault, not intentional." Then she added, with a visible effort : "I have changed my mind, Captain Dunstan ; I feel that what you have just told me makes a great difference. I will answer any questions you choose to put to me ; I am sure you will not ask me any which I ought not to answer."

He stood still at her words, facing her, while she sat, with drooping head now, and her bright, dark eyes downcast ; her quick brown fingers busy with the fan that hung from her waist. He asked himself, did he love her or did he hate her ? He could not tell, but even then he knew that it

would be well for him to hate her rather than to love her, and better than either to put her quite out of his life, as she had put him quite out of hers. The face that had been with him by day and in his dreams had not been so sweet, so radiant as the real face before him now, but divided from him by a barrier more impassable than that of time and distance. The dignity of womanhood had impressed itself upon Laura, without depriving her of the brightness and the grace of girlhood. As he looked at her, even though the sense of wrong she had done him, and the bitterness of his disappointment, were tugging hard at his heart, to tear it from her hold, Dunstan felt her power over him more strongly than ever. She pitied him then—at least she pitied him; the manner in which his fate had dealt him this blow had something in it which recommended him to her compassion, however indifferent she had been to that fate itself: and he, the betrayed lover, was speedily reduced to such a condition of submission that his anger seemed to be ebbing away, beyond the reach of any effort he might make to grasp, and hold, and keep it warm, and he was actually grateful for her pity. He drew a deep breath, and, at the silent invitation of her eyes, he resumed his seat, despising himself as he did so, and asking himself whither had gone the just indignation that had led him a minute or two previously to repudiate with scorn the notion that there could be peace and friendship between Laura and himself? There came a pause, which was not safe or wise for either. Laura ended it.

"I said that I would answer any questions you might ask me; but you ask me none. Then I will tell you what you wish to know. It is soon, if not easily told. I was very unhappy at home, indeed I may say unwelcome—you knew enough of us to understand that—there was no chance of things being different. I had made no promise to you; I thought you would know that it must be so as well as I knew it. Neither you nor I had any excuse for mistaking the unreal in life for the real, and I married Mr. Thornton."

"After a brief acquaintance, I believe."

"I had not known him very long, it is true; but I knew him well enough to trust him."

"With that risky charge, the happiness of a woman who—or I must indeed have been a fool, or befooled—who did not love him?"

He spoke hotly and bitterly She made him no reply.

"I beg your pardon. That is one of those questions which I have no right to ask, which you felt so sure I would not ask. Pass it by, and tell me this instead. Was it altogether by and with your own free will? Were you bullied into it at all? At least you need not hesitate to tell me this; you cannot have forgotten, or suppose that I have forgotten, the part Lady Rosa acted towards myself."

"I was not bullied, I was to a certain extent persuaded. But, Captain Dunstan," here Laura rallied, and from that moment she was far more composed than he—"I think it is best to say that it is not with me as you may imagine; as it might be reasonable that you should be glad to imagine. I am placed between the pain of hurting your feelings and the necessity for letting you know the simple truth, as you have insisted on knowing anything at all. I am not sorry for my marriage; if you had any idea that it was otherwise, put it away, and——"

"Did you suppose that I had come to you in the style of Jamie in the Scotch ballad, and that I should expect the 'Auld Robin Gray's a guid man to me' kind of sentiment?" asked Dunstan, sneeringly, and growing angry with her again. "I assure you nothing was farther from my intentions. I am not magnanimous enough to congratulate Mr. Thornton, but neither am I mean enough to wish you any ill. I cannot understand you, indeed, but then I am only a man; and I could not have married any other woman but you if there had been all the world to gain by marrying, or all I had in the world to lose by not marrying her. That's the difference, I take it, or one of the differences between a man's notions and a woman's."

"You can help yourselves better," she said, quietly, removing the question to impersonal ground with skill far beyond Dunstan's imitation, "and there is more than one way out of difficulties for you."

"I don't know about *us*," he answered, "I am only thinking of myself. You say there was no promise, you have said that before; now do you think that is a fair answer to give me? Is it honest to say that, having consented to say anything?"

"Perhaps not," and here her voice was troubled, for she remembered how often, during the sleepless hours of the night that dawned into her wedding-day, she had repeated to herself, "it was no promise."

"Perhaps not: but this is all that I can say"

"No, it is not all. There is one thing more, Laura! Forgive me! don't heed the inadvertence, I did not intend to let the old familiar name escape my lips; I would not offend you for the world. But there is one thing more you could say—the truth! You know it, you have known it long—I—I have found it out at last."

"I don't understand you!"

"Oh yes, you do." He spoke very quietly now, all the roughness and the energy had gone out of his speech. "You understand me very well. You never cared for me; you forgot me when I had passed out of your sight; there was nothing in your heart or your conscience to forbid your marrying another man. I have no right to cherish anger against another for any supposed share in what you have done for me, and I should be a fool to cherish anger against you. It was all a blunder; I meant one thing, and you meant another, or rather you meant nothing. Let it be as if it had never been."

"You must be bitter against me, to speak like that," said Laura, with all the inconsistency of a woman, hard and nettled at the exact interpretation which was, in reality, getting her out of a difficulty, and making things more

comfortable for her than she had any right or reason to expect.

"I am not at all bitter against you; but I have come to understand, to see things as they are; to find out that I have only myself to blame; and now all that remains for me is to get over it as soon as possible."

"You will not find that difficult," said Laura, now thoroughly off her guard, and unable to resist the temptation of this feeble sneer, "if you believe me to have been so utterly insincere."

"In Heaven's name, what would you have me to believe? Sincere, when you forgot me? Constant, when you are another man's wife? Two opposites at once! No, no; I am wise, and awakened now, and I read the past aright. It does not throw much brightness or confidence into the future of my life, but I must try to find compensation for that, and at least it sets you more right with me. It is easier to bear the knowledge that you never loved me, Laura, than to know that you did love me, and belied that love. I did not think so when I came into this room, and might have seen the truth in your first look, and heard it in your first word; I believe it now. It is better so Good-bye."

It was his turn now to hold out his hand, and hers to shrink from his touch; but she overcame the impulse, and for a moment their hands met. But she did not speak.

"Good-bye," he repeated, and took one step away from her; paused, as though he were about to say some other word, did not say it, and in another moment was gone.

"I should have liked to have got out that I was glad Mr. Thornton was a good fellow, and that you had told me, but it stuck in my throat," Dunstan said to his friend when he gave him a much-abridged account of the interview, on their way up to London.

Esdaile, who had been fidgety and uncomfortable to a de-

gree which set the soothing influence of his inseparable cigar at defiance, formed as correct a conclusion from the scanty version which Dunstan gave him, with a preliminary and voluntary statement that he was not going to talk about his troubles any more, as if he had been present at the interview. Dunstan had been unable to estimate the influence of time in the matter; all that had happened was new and fresh to him; while Laura had been familiar with the fact that she was for ever separated from him by her own act (and at the very time when the only barrier between them had been removed by fate), since the hour in which she discovered what it was her mother had been so careful to conceal from her on her wedding-day. Dunstan had taken the extreme view of the weakness and persuadability of Laura, and Esdaile neither blamed him for this, nor regretted it. The more thoroughly Dunstan was persuaded that Laura's love for him had existed only in his own imagination, the sooner he would be "cured." Esdaile's cheery nature led him to think it a great pity that there should be any drawback to Dunstan's enjoyment of the good things that fortune had put so unexpectedly in his way, and especially that the drawback should be of a sentimental kind.

"That sort of thing is so hard to deal with," he thought; "it's like religious madness, next to impossible to cure, because it is all about one's self, and there's no getting at any rational side of it. The thing is quite plain to me, and it is just what I should have expected from what I know of the girl. She liked him very much, and if everything had gone fair she would have been a very good wife to Dunstan. She did not particularly care for Thornton, I dare say, but she's a very good wife to him, and she might meet Dunstan every day in the week, and not a bit of harm come of it—to her. He would make a fool of himself, no doubt; so it's just as well he has taken the 'farewell for evermore' line about it. It's an odd thing that a man should be so des-

perately in earnest about a girl with so little earnestness in her, and it's odder still that I should be acting as improvised guardian to a fellow like Dunstan. Comes of having nothing particular to do, I suppose."

"The fact is, my dear fellow," said Dunstan, when he had terminated his narrative, and after a silence during which Esdaile had been coming to the above conclusions, "I think it is all a mistake to suppose that women are so much more capable of love and constancy than we are. Some of them don't know the meaning of love and constancy."

"A good many of them, I should say," assented Esdaile, with an air of profound wisdom.

"I only know that I shall never believe in a woman again."

"Oh yes, you will, Dunstan; it's your way. Only next time you must believe in the right woman."

Then they really did change the conversation, and Esdaile felt that he had not been quite fair towards Laura; though, as he mentally added, it could not harm her, and was all for Dunstan's good.

On their arrival in London the friends separated, but only for a few days. Esdaile was going to make some visits, Dunstan to "look about him," until they should go down to Bevis together.

When Edward Dunstan left her, Mrs. Thornton lost the composure which she had maintained by a painful effort during the latter portion of their interview, and gave way to tears. They sprang from a mingled source, partly wounded feelings, partly hurt pride. She had intended to speak so differently from the way in which she had spoken; she had anticipated such different words from Dunstan. She did not know what she had expected, but it was not what had happened. More anger, perhaps, if, indeed, he refused to let the past rest altogether, but not scorn, and not an expression of disbelief in her. That at least was not just. She did not love Dunstan now; not a feeling which the most proud and

jealous husband could be entitled to resent stirred her heart at the prospect of seeing him, or troubled her in his presence; but she had loved him. Not firmly, not strongly, not sublimely, not with the persevering faith which might be all very natural and easy to a girl who had nobody to bully and wear her out, but was not natural or easy to Laura, living under the awful rule of Lady Rosa; still in her own way, and according to her own power, she had loved him. She hoped it was not very wrong to cry over the remembrance of that love, and for his disdainful disbelief in it. Laura was not poetical or romantic, but she did feel "upset," as she would have described her sensations, by the dispersion of her little plan for the pretty and pious adornment of the grave of that old love which she had buried out of her sight. Dunstan had denied that it had ever lived, died, and been buried at all! She suffered severely from this rude interruption of her life of pleasant reality, from this sudden fling back into the world of remembrance and sentiment which she had left behind her, and, as a great deal of childishness still lingered in Laura's nature and ways, she threw herself on her bed to have her cry out, and very soon sobbed herself to sleep.

It was late in the afternoon when Laura awoke, with a pale face and a bad headache, for the first time in her life. She always had perfect health, and never affected any kind of illness, so that her husband, returning from the trial-trip of the *Firefly* to a late dinner, was quite distressed about her. Laura made light of her ailments and her looks, and, saying that she should be all right after she had some sleep, retired to her room again.

Before she left Mr. Thornton she mentioned that she had seen an old friend that day, Captain Dunstan, who had just arrived from India, with Sir Wilfrid Esdaile. Laura believed Mr. Thornton knew Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, and had met him at Lowndes Street. Yes, Mr. Thornton had met him, remembered him perfectly, and was sorry he had missed

Sir Wilfrid and his friend; they might have liked a sail in the *Firefly*. Laura rather thought they had left Southampton; it had been mentioned that they were pressed for time.

All this was said with intention, yet Laura meant no harm at all. She was not clever, but she was intelligent, and she had learned, to a certain extent, to understand her husband.

CHAPTER XII.

BURY HOUSE.

A LITTLE difficulty, which, although he denounced it to himself as quite ridiculous, was nevertheless puzzling, not to say insuperable, presented itself to Sir Wilfrid Esdaile when, on his arrival in London, he wished to proceed immediately to the fulfilment of his promise to John Sandilands. Of course he must see Miss Carmichael as soon as possible, but how was it to be done? It had not occurred to Sir Wilfrid to ask himself that question until after he and Dunstan had parted company; but even if it had, he would not have liked to mention the matter to his unlucky friend, the man who had just come in for such a splendid thing by a turn of the wheel of fortune. The less said to him about the Chumleighs or their belongings the better. Sir Wilfrid had been very uncomfortable about all that business at Southampton; it had turned out much better than he expected; but the wisest course was to drop the subject, and everything collateral to it, altogether.

Of course, Colonel and Lady Rosa Chumleigh would not be in town in September. How stupid it had been of Sandilands and himself not to remember that! Their country place was somewhere in Kent, but Sir Wilfrid had never been there, and he knew no one in the neighbourhood. He could not volunteer a visit to Hunsford, or approach the place by any indirect manœuvre. He called at the house

in Lowndes Street, and found it arrayed in the regulation London livery for September; window-blinds done up in newspaper, and a couple of broken flower-pots, with withered twigs in them, displayed forlornly in a corner of the dining-room balcony. From the elderly female in charge, who was taking in her evening beer from a potboy with a refreshing air of leisure about him, as Sir Wilfrid's hansom drove up, he learned that the "last family" had left, and the house was in the "hagent's 'ands."

"It's a nuisance," thought Sir Wilfrid, on his way to his club, "though, of course, I did not really think she would be there. I should like to have been able to tell John in my first letter that I had seen her, and handed over his souvenir safely. And, by the way, how am I to do that? I shouldn't think Lady Rosa was a person to let the key of the letter-bag out of her own hands, or to fail to scrutinise her niece's correspondence pretty closely—though, to be sure, she writes to John safely enough. They must have some way of managing that: I wish I had thought of asking him. That hateful letter-bag is one of the greatest worries of country life, and one always knows exactly the sort of place where it is made a business of. It would hardly do for me to write to Miss Carmichael at Hunsford on the chance."

Sir Wilfrid merely called at his club for his letters, and then drove on to his London abode, a comfortable suite of rooms in Belgrave Gardens, free from the effeminate frippery and contemptible luxury that are to be found at the present day in the dwellings of young men, whose ancestors, English worthies, would repudiate such soft and silken puppies with a stern and wholesome disgust. Having told his servant, the man who had accompanied him to Ceylon, that he would dine at the club that evening, and start for Scotland the next, he placed the little packet with which John Sandilands had charged him, and which he had taken to Lowndes Street on the least likely of chances, in a drawer

of a cabinet; and, in doing so, received a suggestion on the point that was troubling him. A slim box, containing a tortoiseshell fan, lay at the edge of the drawer, and attached to it was a card inscribed, in John Sandilands' handwriting: "Miss Susan Sandilands, from J. S."

"Of course," said Sir Wilfrid, to himself, "that's the right thing to do. I'll write to the old lady, and send the parcel for Miss Carmichael to her. She's in their confidence, and I dare say she knows by this time that I am—in his, at least."

The writing of the short letter to Julia Carmichael, in which he claimed her friendship on the ground of his possession of that of her affianced lover, and gave her a glowing account of John, his health, his work, and his prospects, adding a few sentences of warm acknowledgment of the energy and ability with which John was advancing his—Sir Wilfrid's—interests, was a difficult task to Sir Wilfrid Esdaile. He was not awkward, but he was in good earnest diffident whenever it befell him to have in any way to face that ever-puzzling problem, which he familiarly phrased thus: "Why the deuce should a fellow like me be so much better off than a fellow like Sandilands?" If, however, Julia were really as nice as John represented her, she would take his letter as it was meant, and never for a moment suspect him of a patronising intention. He enclosed his letter to Julia in a kind and respectful epistle to Miss Sandilands, in which he did not stint his praise of John, and added that he was as well acquainted with Bury House as if he had shared the good luck of his friend by living there, so closely had he studied the old house from the pencil-drawing—Miss Susan's own work—that occupied the place of honour in John's far-away home. He might have added that the work of art in question, and a map of the plantation, which John himself had executed with great care and nicety, were the only mural decorations boasted by the bungalow. Sir Wilfrid then placed the two letters,

and the presents with which John had charged him, in a beautifully-carved ivory and silver box, a present from himself to Miss Sandilands, and, having charged his servant to pack and despatch the parcel early on the following day, he dismissed the matter from his mind with the reflection that he was very sorry he had not been able to carry out the wishes of John Sandilands more effectively

The roundabout expedient of Sir Wilfrid Esdaile had a more direct result than he anticipated. A few days after his arrival at a sombre castle in the north of Scotland, where a number of fine folk were assembled for the purposes of slaughter that fill the British bosom with joy in the beautiful autumnal days, a letter reached him, addressed in a hand of the kind which used to be called "Italian," small, sloping, old-fashioned, a great contrast to the square, aggressive burliness of a modern lady's writing—and couched in the following terms :

"Bury House, B——, *September*, 187—.

"Dear Sir Wilfrid Esdaile,

"I have had the honour and gratification of receiving your letter, together with the handsome present from my dear nephew, of which you kindly took charge ; and I avail myself gladly of the opportunity thus afforded me of offering you the combined thanks of my sister and myself for all that you have done for John. We are very sensible of your goodness, and we are equally proud and convinced that our nephew will prove himself in all respects worthy of your friendship. I had no difficulty in carrying out your wishes with respect to Miss Carmichael, as she happens to be with us at present. She begs me to thank you in her name for the kindness with which you charged yourself with my nephew's commission for her, and to say that she regrets extremely that she had not the opportunity of seeing you when you so kindly called at the house in Lowndes Street, formerly occupied by her uncle and Lady

Rosa Chumleigh. She is the more sorry for this, as there does not seem to be any probable opportunity of her seeing you, Lady Rosa Chumleigh having given up her house in town, and proposing to remain at Hunsford indefinitely. My sister and myself feel that it would be presumption on our part to invite you to visit us at Bury House; at the same time we should be deeply sensible of the kindness you would confer upon us, if, by any chance, it might fit in with your other arrangements, to pass a little time there.

"Your proved friendship for our nephew emboldens me to trouble you with some information relative to ourselves. John being provided for, and our many years of toil having proved modestly remunerative, my sister and I have decided on giving up the school, to the duties of which we no longer feel ourselves equal, and we hope to pass the remnant of our days in the old house in which we have lived for so many years. Our pupils have therefore left us, these holidays, for the last time, and henceforth we are to be the only occupants of Bury House, until, as we hope and pray, our nephew and his wife shall live in it in the years to come. Bury House is our own property, acquired by our own earnings, and will be his when we are gone. The honour of a visit from you would be very highly esteemed. It is, of course, only on John's account that we should venture to ask such a favour. Miss Carmichael has been staying with us since the final breaking up of the school, and will remain until the second week of next month, when her uncle and Lady Rosa Chumleigh expect her to return to Hunsford. We are looking forward to the coming of another dear young friend, a former pupil, who may perhaps become a permanent resident with us; but at any time, should it suit you so far to honour us, we shall be ready to welcome you to Bury House, where there is indeed nothing to offer you as an inducement, beyond the assurance of the pleasure you would confer on those who are already so deeply indebted to you. I am, dear Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, with the best thanks

and compliments of my sister united to my own,—Your obliged and grateful servant,

"SUSAN SANDILANDS."

"What a dear, formal, fine old lady," said Sir Wilfrid to himself, after he had read the foregoing letter twice over, "and how little notion she has of the real state of the case. Ingratitude is a cutting sort of thing, no doubt; all the moralists and all the poets must be right about that—but, on the other hand, too much gratitude is uncommonly embarrassing; it makes a man feel like a humbug. I wonder whether there really is very little kindness and consideration going about, such a small allowance of them seems to go such an amazingly long way. If our accounts were made up, it would be seen that I owe John a great deal more than he owes me, even in that vulgar but indispensable item, money. Nothing I should like better than to go and see the good old ladies and the old-fashioned place, to say nothing of such an unexpected opportunity of meeting John's lady-love. Let me see, how do I stand in point of engagements? A week here, and then the Daunts, and join Dunstan in town on the 10th; he's in no hurry to get to Bevis. I can do it by throwing the Daunts over, and I dare say it will be much pleasanter."

Thereupon Sir Wilfrid Esdaile wrote a cordial letter to Miss Sandilands—really almost the kind of letter dear John himself might have written, the supremely-gratified old ladies described it—announcing his intention of presenting himself at Bury House in ten days from the date of the document.

Among the pleasures of Julia Carmichael's life, she rated a visit to Bury House very high. It had its negative, as well as its positive, good side. It meant getting away from Lady Rosa Chumleigh, as distinctly as it meant being with the dear old friends who sympathised with her so entirely in regarding John Sandilands as

the most perfect and the most important personage in all creation, and who decidedly "spoiled" Julia because she was the beloved of their peerless nephew. On the present occasion Julia was disposed to rate the negative side of the pleasure of her visit unusually high, for Lady Rosa had been uncommonly difficult of late. An unendurably fine edge had been put upon her temper by the visit of her daughter and her son-in-law to Hunsford. Mr. Thornton's polite imperturbability, and a certain intolerable air of considering Colonel Chumleigh of chief importance, which nothing induced him to lay aside, had exasperated Lady Rosa to a pitch which almost rendered her insensible to, or at least temporarily oblivious of, the grand fact that she had got her daughter off her mind, and also escaped scot-free from any unpleasantness about the Dunstan affair.

It had been hard times for the Colonel, Julia, and the household, and it was with undisguised envy that the Colonel saw Julia off for Bury House. There were no kind old ladies to ask him on a visit, and he could foresee nothing likely to procure a holiday for him, though he would have hailed one of his pretty frequent attacks of toothache—invariably denounced by Lady Rosa as his own fault, and a proof of weakness of mind—as an excuse for a couple of days in town, with no livelier society than that of his dentist. Julia looked after her uncle as he hurried away before the train started—he had a lot of commissions to execute in the town, and Lady Rosa never permitted anybody but herself to keep the ponies standing—with a sort of remorseful pity; and yet she did not make things much easier for him.

"What a life," thought Julia; "what a breakneck mistake is such a marriage! And yet, if she died to-morrow, everybody would expect him to be sorry, and be shocked if he allowed it to be found out that he wasn't; and she is considered a paragon because she never ran away with anybody!" The idea of anybody possibly

existing who could have been induced to aid and abet the Lady Rosa Chumleigh in such a departure from the matrimonial laws, made Julia involuntarily laugh aloud, whereupon three ladies who had previously taken their places in the carriage bent upon her looks of supercilious and disdainful wonder, and she blushingly sought refuge in a yellow railway volume. The journey, although not long, was complicated, and Julia, albeit she had been sustained by sundry refreshing peeps at recent letters of John Sandilands, was glad to arrive at her destination.

To Julia, Bury House meant "home," in the best acceptation of that word which had ever been within her reach. Her past, all that was pleasantest in her present, and the dearly-cherished hopes of her future, associated themselves with the old house and its inmates. At first, when her engagement to John Sandilands was quite recent, there had come a strange and delightful shyness over her with respect to the house, with whose every corner she had long been familiar. It seemed so strange, so difficult to realise that in those rooms John had played, learned his first lessons, and got into and out of his early troubles, in his childhood. It was as though she had to make acquaintance with them all over again, and they became doubly dear to her. It seemed to Julia that other betrothed lovers, who knew comparatively little of each other's past lives, must have much less to say to each other, or to write about, in the letters which form the best alleviation of absence, than she and John, who had so much in common even now.

Bury House had never had the aspect of a school of the modern order; it was an old, rambling, comfortable, picturesque house, overgrown with greenery, with innumerable unsymmetrical windows, tall gable ends, and a roomy rustic porch, set down in the middle of a smooth lawn, which boasted some of the finest beech and walnut-trees in the county. A large garden, in which fruit and vegetables were more sedulously cultivated than flowers, and an orchard,

both situated at the rear of the house, completed the little domain.

Bury House was not more unlike the modern notion of a boarding-school than the Misses Sandilands were unlike any of the modern types of school-mistresses. There was a considerable difference between the respective ages of the two sisters, but they were very like each other, both being small of stature, with refined, kindly faces, silvery white hair, and gentle voices, into which thirty years of teaching and command had not brought one discordant note. It was a common saying among the girls who were educated at Bury House that they never could think of "the ladies" as "horrid old maids, but rather as if they were nice pleasant widows whose husbands had died a long time ago, so that they had got over it, but had all the feeling-heartedness left." No doubt, the quicker sympathies, and the broader views that the girls recognised, and thus expressed in homely language, were largely due to the influence exercised upon their lives by the orphan child, to whom they had jointly devoted themselves. The cares and duties of maternity had been theirs, although without its dear privileges and its inalienable rights, and they had brought their reward with them. Few happier old ladies would have been found in England than the Misses Sandilands, when, the pleasant little bustle of Julia's arrival over, they were sitting at tea in the porch, and hearing as much of the contents of John's last letters as they could fairly expect. But Julia had, in her turn, a good deal to hear from them, especially about the final breaking-up of the school, and Miss Susan was the chief speaker.

"Of course, my dear, at the last, it was a little painful, and all the dear girls felt very much the going away for good; but it is quite surprising, and, indeed, I may say providential, when one comes to think of it, that they almost all belong to the county, and can come to see us one at a time, if they like. Miss Gordon and Miss Walker are

well placed as resident governesses; they both said they really could not think of going into any other school, after Bury House, and it all came much easier than you would suppose. The two maids we have parted with would have been leaving, at all events, to be married, poor silly things, so that it's no worse for them than it must have been."

"Is the school-room dismantled yet?" asked Julia.

"No; it is just the same, with the benches and the desks, and the bookcases and blackboards."

"I am glad of that. I shall like to see it once more. I dare say it will end in your keeping it locked up, and paying it periodical visits. You know you have a hankering after relics and souvenirs. There's John's room, a complete sanctuary."

Miss Susan shook her head in deprecation of Julia's sauciness, and answered with a smile:

"No, no; there's a little bit of news connected with the school-room which we purposely kept back until you came. It's the largest room in the house, you know——"

"And the pleasantest, with the twin elms in front of the windows, and those lovely broad window-seats."

"Just so. It is the pleasantest room in the house, and the book-room, opening from it, is a very nice room too. The two would make a pleasant sitting-room and bed-room, would not they?"

"Delightful. But there are multitudes of bed-rooms already, and three heavenly sitting-rooms. What on earth can the school-room and the book-room be wanted for?"

"Ah! that is just our bit of news," said Miss Jane. "We are going to have a permanent boarder, my dear; an old friend too."

"I am so glad. I could not help fearing you would be lonely, after being so long accustomed to a lot of young people about you. Who is it?"

"It is a lady, my dear." Miss Susan now took up the

tale. "A former pupil of ours finds herself in circumstances which oblige her to look for a home, while she has a small independence which places her above having to earn one; and her greatest wish is to return to Bury House."

"Of course it is," said Julia, in a tone of thorough conviction. "What a sensible person, and how good of you to let her come. But who is she? Was she here in my time? Do I know her at all?"

"Yes, you may remember her; she was here before you, but also in your time. Her name is Janet Monro."

"Of course, I remember asking you about her. My cousin Laura took a violent fancy to a sister-in-law of hers up in Scotland. You like her very much, do you not?"

"Very much indeed. When she was at school with us here she was a favourite pupil. We had not seen her for a long time when she wrote to us a week ago, to know if she might come to us the next day, having a great favour to ask of us. She came, having seen it announced in one of the country papers that we had given up the school; and the object of her visit was to arrange for coming to live with us."

"Did you like her as much as ever?"

Miss Jane struck in:

"Janet Monro was greatly altered since we had seen her last, but in all respects that we could discern, for the better. We were so pleased with her that we could not refuse her, though of course we had not intended anything of the kind."

"It seemed strange," said Miss Susan, "that she should have been so long away, and not have stretched the horizon of her life more widely than she has done; but the little she told us accounts for it. We were the only friends she had when she left us to go as companion to Mrs. Drummond of Bevis. Her brother was away at sea; he was her sole surviving relative, and she made no new friends, except Mrs. Drummond herself, during the years she lived with her."

Mrs. Drummond of Bevis! Julia's attention was

thoroughly aroused now. The dead woman's name had come to bear a strange significance to more than one person who had never known her in life. A few days only had elapsed since Julia had been made aware of the episode in her cousin Laura's life with which Mrs. Drummond of Bevis had been so closely connected. She had dimly remembered, when Laura made the long-deferred revelation to her, that in some trifling way the names of the people and the place had previously been brought under her notice, but she traced the chain of association no farther. The only communication Julia had had from Laura—a few lines written just as she was going on board the *Firefly*—was a mere announcement of her own and Mr. Thornton's departure, in good health and spirits; and the episode seemed to have slid back again into safe obscurity and oblivion. And now, here, in another scene, in a department of her life with which her cousin had nothing whatever to do, she was reminded vividly of the brief and baffled love-story, concerning which she had felt an apprehension, which might indeed be unreasonable, but was certainly irresistible.

"Oh, do tell me all about Mrs. Drummond," said Julia, eagerly. "I am so curious about her. I want to know why she left Bevis, after all, to Admiral Drummond's nephew. My uncle, and Lady Rosa, and Laura, knew Captain Dunstan very well, and he has only just left Ceylon, where he stayed on his way back from India, and went up to the plantation with Sir Wilfrid Esdaile. They were just about to leave when John wrote last."

"I cannot tell you anything about that matter," said Miss Susan, "for Janet did not enter upon it at all with us. The story of her life with Mrs. Drummond was an uncommon one. Mrs. Drummond was a peculiar person, not easy to get on with, and given to strong likes and dislikes. Janet went from here to her, a mere school-girl. Mrs. Drummond had been attracted by her face and her voice;

she overlooked, indeed, I believe she liked, her inexperience ; and the admiral also took to the girl in an extraordinary way. She was treated by them like a daughter ; and she deserved such treatment, I am sure. Since the admiral's death Bevis must have been a dreary place enough for a young girl to live in ; but Janet has very quiet tastes, as she proves by proposing to come and live with us—also old people—in our quiet way. Mrs. Drummond provided for her, not by will, but by a gift of money, some time before her death ; and there she is, tolerably independent, and alone in the world."

"Is she a pretty girl ?"

"We think her so, but she is not what would be called a beauty"

"And when does she come ?"

"We expect to hear to-morrow. And we thought it would be very nice to have you to see about getting ready for her. We intend to give her the school-room and the book-room, because she wishes to have them, and also because she brings with her a very handsome piano and a large collection of books, the gift of Admiral and Mrs. Drummond."

"I hope she is not a learned lady, or one of those dreadful people who practise seven hours a day," thought Julia, with an unaccountable movement of ill-humour. Her curiosity having abated, she did not want this Janet Monro to come between her and her old friends, with rights almost equal to her own, John excepted. John was, however, such a vast and important exception, that the timely remembrance of him checked her little bit of temper at the point of wishing that Miss Monro had not arranged to come to Bury House quite so soon.

"It will be very pleasant to get the rooms ready," said Julia, after a little pause of self-conquest. "You may expect me to begin to-morrow morning. We will have in the gardener, and clear all the benches and things away to

the lofts, and you shall see how smart I will make the rooms look."

The old ladies smiled approval of her zeal, and then the subject dropped, after Julia had asked one more question.

"How far is Bevis from here?"

"Only ten miles," said Miss Susan; "but that was quite far enough to prevent our seeing anything of Janet, for Mrs. Drummond has never come near Bury since she had a tiff with the rector, and any people whom she visited live on the other side."

On the following morning Julia arose in the liveliest spirits, and with the best intentions, but her mind was quickly turned in a direction with which Miss Janet Monro had nothing whatever to do; for, while the three ladies were at breakfast, the parcel from Sir Wilfrid Esdaile arrived, and caused a great commotion of excitement and delight. The Misses Sandilands were immensely pleased with Sir Wilfrid's letter, and learning from Julia that he was completely in the confidence of their nephew, and that she was particularly anxious to see him, they conceived the bold idea of inviting him to visit them. With the simplicity of good breeding, they were free from any apprehension that Sir Wilfrid would be too "fine" for their quiet household and simple manners, and Julia, whose knowledge of the ways of the fashionable world was very extensive when compared with their complete ignorance, bore the testimony of her own slight acquaintance with Esdaile to his being unaffected and easy to get on with. The invitation, destined, as we have seen, to a cordial reception, was despatched on the same day, and the second post brought a letter from Miss Monro to Miss Susan Sandilands. The young lady asked her friend whether she might be received at Bury House in ten days, adding that a letter from the family lawyer to the housekeeper had informed that functionary of Captain Dunstan's intention to arrive at Bevis with a friend, within a fortnight.

"Well," said Julia, when Miss Susan Sandilands imparted the contents of Miss Monro's letter to her, a little nervously, "this is an instance of the uncertainty of human affairs. Instead of my quiet time, all to ourselves, and the dogs, and the hens and chickens, here we are in a whirl of business and a vortex of society, for I feel certain Sir Wilfrid Esdaile will come."

Julia was right. Sir Wilfrid bade them expect him on the same day as that named for Miss Monro's arrival, and proposed to remain until he should be obliged to join a friend at a place which was, he believed, in their neighbourhood, though he knew little of the geography of Suffolk. The friend was Captain Dunstan, of Bevis, of whom John had doubtless told them.

The writing of that letter was Sir Wilfrid Esdaile's first step on the way to his fate.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FAREWELL AND A MEETING.

THE last of a series of changes, after a long period of uninterrupted routine, which had begun with the death of Admiral Drummond, was about to take place at Bevis. Silence and stillness had reigned within the walls since the admiral's widow had been laid in a niche of the family vault, which had been widened, so that in death she should not be divided from the object of a love that had been more steadfast than indulged, or self-indulgent, during their joint lifetime. The monotony had been rarely broken from without. No bereaved relations remained in the house, to be formally inquired for, with the stereotyped reply as the result of the civility; and the new master of Bevis was still absent, neither had any certain information respecting him reached the neighbourhood, in which Captain Dunstan was hardly known. Mrs. Drummond's "com-

panion," indeed, was still at Bevis, much to the surprise of the few persons who knew the fact; but except the clergyman of the parish and his wife, no one seemed to think that visits of condolence were due to the young lady. Miss Monro was no relation; she had no social standing in the neighbourhood: and the extreme retirement in which Mrs. Drummond had chosen to live after the admiral's death, had been unfavourable to Miss Monro's chance of making friends.

To the clergyman and his wife Miss Monro had given an explanation of her remaining at Bevis. She did so by the express desire of Mrs. Drummond, whose final instructions to her on the point had been explicit. She was not to go away from her old home, until Captain Dunstan's return to England, and the period at which he proposed to take possession of Bevis should have been notified to her. Mrs. Drummond's instructions included another behest: but this, as things had turned out, Miss Monro did not think it expedient to repeat to Mr. Cathcart.

"I particularly wish Edward Dunstan to renew his acquaintance with you." Mrs. Drummond had said to the girl, who found her self-command and composure taxed nearly to the utmost of their endurance by the business-like manner in which her best friend was making all her arrangements for the event that was to part them. "You cannot be here when he comes, although I wish you to remain until just before: so you must ask Mrs. Cathcart to receive you for a few days, when you hear from him."

"I—I hear from Captain Dunstan? Why should he write to me?"

"Because he will have had directions from me to do so. I have written a few lines to him, and my letter will be forwarded by Mr. Cleeve. In it I have desired him to notify his arrival at Bevis to you, and to learn from you my wishes about things connected with the place, the servants, and other matters, of which you are in possession. Mrs. Cathcart

will be very glad to have you with her for awhile, and you can explain to Edward Dunstan all that we have talked about, but I have not strength to write. Promise me that you will do this—exactly this."

"I promise. I will do anything, everything you wish."

The dying woman lay for a long time still and silent; the girl's hand in hers. When she next spoke, it was to say, with her eyes (which still retained a searching expression characteristic of them) fixed on Janet's face in anxious scrutiny:

"Once more, Janet, my one beloved object on earth, are you quite sure? The time is short, but there is enough of it; the thing can be undone. It seemed very far off when it was done; think again—think again."

Softly, without disturbing Mrs. Drummond, Janet Monro, from whose face every trace of colour had faded while those words were spoken, slid from her chair to her knees, and gently laid her fresh young lips upon the wan face upon the pillow. Then she said, very low and very distinctly:

"I am quite sure. And for all the deeds for which I shall love and bless you in this world and the next, I love and bless you most for that one."

"Amen, then, so be it;" but the dying woman sighed heavily, and moved restlessly, as if the turn of pain had come again: as indeed it had; so this was the last of such plain and clear question and answer between the two.

The end came, and all things passed as had been pre-arranged by the stern-mannered but loving-hearted woman, who had suffered many a pang, almost keen enough to have conveyed a revelation of the motherhood she had never known, in anticipation of what fate might have in store for the forlorn girl who had been to her as a daughter. Among her papers, all left in perfect order, was found the letter which she had spoken of to Miss Monro, and Mr. Cleeve took possession of it. With a steady patience Janet Monro bore her great loss; there were few to witness, and none to

measure her sorrow; with minute exactness she fulfilled every spoken behest of Mrs. Drummond, and with the sensitive accuracy of a great affection she followed, in all the minor arrangements and incidents of such a time, every indication which her experience in the past had furnished.

Only in one respect did any difficulty arise with respect to the scrupulous carrying out of Mrs. Drummond's wishes by the girl who had very truly been the one beloved object on earth to her, but who, nevertheless, had met her dearest wish with opposition so determined that she had been forced to yield. That great and decisive conflict had, however, been among the things of the past for a considerable time before Mrs. Drummond's death; "an old story, which no one can ever rake up now," Miss Monro said to herself, musing over all that had happened, in her sad and stately solitude; and the pressing distress of the moment was that there should be any behest of Mrs. Drummond's impossible for her to fulfil now. Time passed, however, and Edward Dunstan made no sign. Miss Monro knew that he had received from Mr. Cleeve the intimation of Mrs. Drummond's death and his own inheritance, for the family lawyer had written to her on receipt of his instructions from Captain Dunstan; and then she had looked for the communication which Mrs. Drummond had led her to expect.

No letter reached her; she was at once puzzled, distressed, and relieved. But she could not make the request of Mrs. Cathcart that she had been directed to make, under circumstances which did not bear out Mrs. Drummond's intentions. If no letter or message from the new owner of Bevis should come to her, she must arrange for leaving the place before his arrival. What she was ultimately to do when her dear old friend should be no more with her, had also been discussed between them but briefly; the matter had been easily arranged. Janet Monro had no nearer tie of kindred than her brother's widow, who was also her first cousin; and no friends except the Misses Sandilands, from

whose house she had gone to Mrs. Drummond's. Some self-reproach the latter lady felt when she thought of those slender resources, and that by the sacrifice of her own recluse tastes and habits, she might have secured other and more powerful friends for Janet. Different, very different it might have been, but for that one great conflict in which Mrs. Drummond had been so utterly worsted, but for that old story which it was vain to recur to now. That Janet should not bind herself to a settled residence with her sister-in-law, but should secure a home at Bury House, was Mrs. Drummond's advice; and the girl, who could hardly endure the discussion, hastily assured her that it would be adopted.

"Bury House is not far from Bevis," thought Mrs. Drummond; "that will be a good thing."

"Bury House is too near Bevis," thought Janet Monro; "that will be the hardest part of it."

But neither put her thoughts into words for the other's hearing, in the supreme hour of confidence and counsel.

When Miss Monro had made the desired arrangement with the ladies at Bury House, the great blank of reality, the dreadful certainty of change, fell upon her, and she cowered under it as we all do.

Then the days that yet remained to her at Bevis became very precious, and her thoughts were "long, long thoughts." But Captain Dunstan took no notice of the letter which had reached him with its solemn claim on his attention, that no wish of the writer's could ever again be addressed to him, and Mrs. Drummond's injunction must remain unfulfilled.

At length there came a break in the silence; made by a few lines from Captain Dunstan to "the Housekeeper at Bevis," by which she was directed to expect his arrival, with a friend, on the 10th of October. The household treated Miss Monro with great respect—from the influence of discipline inexorably maintained during their former mistress's time; but it was only natural that they should

feel curious about the young lady, who was "out of a place," as they called it, far more certainly than themselves, for the chances were ten to one that Captain Dunstan would keep them on ; and there being no mention of her in Mrs. Drummond's will, they did not know how she was "left off." Considering how fond of Miss Monro Mrs. Drummond had been, the domestic tribunal could not quite make it out, except by the easy explanation that such conduct was all of a piece with fine folks' ways ; they never cared for anybody when they had got as much as they wanted out of them. And now, here was the new master's first missive, addressed to the housekeeper, and containing no allusion to Miss Monro. It was not a very civil way of giving her the turn out ; but in that light it must be taken.

Mrs. Manners took the document up to Miss Monro at once, and watched her closely while she read it.

"The 10th," said Miss Monro, folding the letter and replacing it in its cover, "and this is the 2nd ; it is not long notice, but fortunately everything is in perfect order."

There was not the faintest indication in Miss Monro's face or voice that the intelligence had any special interest for her.

"I suppose the best rooms should be got ready, ma'am ?" said the housekeeper, "and that you will not wish the admiral's corridor to be opened ?"

"I prefer that those rooms should remain as they are until you can take Captain Dunstan's orders."

Miss Monro then talked of something else, and Mrs. Manners had to return to her own dominions without the least abatement of her curiosity. There was no getting to know much about this solitary girl, the ordinary link between upstairs and downstairs being wanting. The only change in the staff of domestics had been the dismissal of Mrs. Drummond's maid. Of course no such functionary was attached to the service of Miss Monro. On that day, however, it was the privilege of a housemaid to report that Miss

Monro had been for hours in the admiral's corridor, that she had locked herself in, and that, when she came out and went to her own room for a bonnet and shawl, she had evidently been crying. The housemaid had not seen Miss Monro's eyes so red and tired-looking since the day after the funeral. They were not, on the whole, ill-natured people, those downstairs folk at Bevis, and they were not ill-disposed towards Miss Monro; but things were very dull, and there was some excitement in knowing that something was happening which excited emotion in some one in the house, where for weeks past there had been nothing but new mourning and regular meals.

Something more happened next day. When Mrs. Manners had her morning interview with Miss Monro, she learned that it would be the last but one.

"I shall leave Bevis to-morrow," said Miss Monro; "and I shall have to give you a great deal of trouble to-day, I am afraid—but I am sure you will not mind it—in getting my things packed."

"To-morrow, ma'am?" Mrs. Manners looked startled and sorry. "That is very soon. Of course no one will think anything a trouble that's done for you."

"Thank you. It must have come some time, you know, Mrs. Manners; and it may as well come now."

"May I take the liberty of asking if you are going far away, and to friends? A young lady like you——"

"No, I am not going far; only to Bury House I came from there, years ago, to Bevis." There was a touch of softness, a little tremulousness about Miss Monro; the tone of kindly interest in the woman's voice had touched her. "I shall be with friends—not like the friend I have lost, indeed, that could not be; but all will be well with me. I must not keep you talking, however; we have no time to lose."

The morrow had come. A fine autumnal day, with a pale blue sky, fast-flitting light clouds, and a pleasant wind

that carried with it the scent of the beautiful sad season. The noble woods of Bevis were clad in their autumnal hues, and though the earth was strewn with red and yellow, their brown and russet leaves, they still retained enough of their foliage to preserve the rounded, velvety, misty outline that is the supreme beauty of its maturity. The fallen leaves were in the woods only, and in the park outside the boundary of the wide-spreading, smooth-shaven, mossy lawn. On its green expanse, new risen from the pressure of the rollers, lay not a leaf; exquisite order presided over the lonely, silent scene, with no eyes to behold it save those of the stately peacock on the terrace with his brilliant tail, slightly ruffled by the wind, hanging over the balustrade. His attention was seemingly directed rather to the house than to the beauties of nature beyond it, and he jerked his fine head and glistening neck impatiently. Presently one of the long French windows was opened from within, and Miss Monro appeared upon the terrace; whereupon the bird stepped towards her with the undulations of his kind, and she fed him with bread. This was evidently a daily ceremony, and was taking place a little late that morning. She laid her hand lingeringly on the bird's head when he had snapped up the last piece of bread, and then she re-entered the house, and, passing through the vast conservatory, came out on the lawn, and took her way across it to the flower-gardens.

When Miss Monro returned from her solitary walk the household was astir, and breakfast had been laid for her on a small table in a window of the library which commanded one of the best views of Bevis. The majesty of the great trees, the luxuriance of the vegetation, the felicitous undulation of the ground, the peaceful and prosperous character of the scenery, were especially well displayed. This was a favourite spot with Miss Monro, and a great many of the recollections of her life at Bevis attached themselves to it. And this was the last, the very last time that she should

recall them, with the same beloved scene before her eyes. She would not have made a pretence to herself of eating, but she was bound to be mindful of the solemn man in black who was in attendance.

On a large table lay a pile of businesslike-looking books —the inventories of all the household goods and chattels which had passed into the possession of Captain Dunstan. Miss Monro seated herself before this uninviting collection when she had breakfasted, and slowly turned over the pages of the books in succession, smiling occasionally at some notion that was in her mind. When she had concluded her inspection, she glanced at the great bronze clock on the mantelpiece, and rang the bell. Mrs. Manners appeared.

"These are all right," said Miss Monro, "and we may put them away now."

Assisted by the housekeeper, she deposited the books in a cupboard and locked the door. She stood for a little, hesitating, with the key in her hand, and then addressed Mrs. Manners, taking something from her pocket as she spoke.

"You will take charge of this key, and also of this little parcel, which Mrs. Drummond wished Captain Dunstan to receive from a sure hand, and you will let him have them as soon as possible after his arrival."

Very properly, without the least outward manifestation of curiosity, Mrs. Manners received the key and a little packet no bigger than a ring-box, but securely done up in letter-paper and sealed with her late mistress's seal, from the hands of Miss Monro, and promised to observe her directions in reference to them. There remained nothing farther then except some kindly words of farewell to be spoken between Miss Monro and the household, and at noon the carriage came round, and she was taken away from the place whither she had gone full of apprehension and self-distrust, to find more kindness, appreciation, and happiness than is always the lot of girls in the parental home.

When the carriage had turned the curve of the

avenue that hid it from her sight as she stood at the verge of the portico, Mrs. Manners retired to the housekeeper's room, and, for greater security, locked up the key and the little parcel in her cash-box.

"*She* was to have given him that, whatever it may be, as sure as sure," said Mrs. Manners to herself; "though it do seem odd that she should be expected to be here when he came home, and he a single gentleman. I'm certain she was to have given him the little parcel, and whatever else he may be, there's one thing very sure—he has not thought it worth his while to be civil to Miss Monro."

The day that witnessed Janet Monro's departure from Bevis was a busy day at Bury House, and had been preceded by other busy days. Julia proved herself as good as her word, working energetically at the preparations for the reception of Miss Monro, and if she was individually more interested in the expected visit of Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, she was excusable in that respect from more than one point of view. The school-room and the book-room had been cleared: all the furniture that belonged to them under their former conditions had been stowed away in the lofts, and the two rooms made to present as quaint and pretty and bower-like an appearance as could be wished for, by the aid of Julia's taste and ingenuity Then there was a best room to be smartened up for Sir Wilfrid Esdaile; and Julia was no less zealous about this, so that she was very full of business indeed. She was in high spirits too, for she was not only about to see John's best friend, and to pass some time under the same roof with him, but she had a satisfactory letter from Laura, whom, after John, she loved more than any one in the world.

Mrs. Thornton's letter had been written in instalments from the date of their sailing, and posted at the first port at which the *Firefly* touched. Laura was perfectly well, the yacht was a splendid boat, the crew were capital

seamen, Mr. Thornton was delighted with the voyage. Laura had never imagined that a yacht could be made so closely to resemble a delicious, cosy little house of one's own, and she wondered how everything could have been so thoughtfully provided, because she really had not suggested anything; it had all been done by Mr. Thornton. She wished very much that Julia and "poor papa" could be with her, but she was not at all bored. All this was pleasant, and as Mrs. Thornton said nothing of the meeting that had taken place at Southampton, Julia read it with the additionally-pleasant conviction that Laura's going abroad had been most fortunate, and the little cloud whose gathering she had momentarily feared was happily dispersed.

So contented was Julia with herself and with circumstances that she did not find fault with the piling up of the excitement of two arrivals into one day, although she was usually quite sensible of the value of distributed incidents in a country life. She superintended the toilette of the two old ladies, and established them, looking quite smart in their stone-gray silk gowns and fine lace caps, in the bow-window of the dining-room, which commanded the gate, a good hour before Sir Wilfrid Esdaile reached Bury House.

It might truly be said of the gay and good-humoured young baronet, in whom Mr. Gilchrist had discerned some of the facility and impressionableness at once to be expected and deprecated in "Tom Esdaile's boy," that on the present occasion he came, saw, and conquered. Nothing could be better than his manner to the Misses Sandilands, in its pleasant mingling of cordiality and respect; or than the way in which his previous slight acquaintance with Miss Carmichael was improved, without any interval, into the friendly intimacy that was justified by the mandate which he held from John Sandilands.

A rather unamiable Spitz, who was a member of the

household, and had been remarkable for his prejudices against certain of the pupils, and for the difficulty with which he admitted strangers to make his acquaintance, recognised Sir Wilfrid's eligibility in the handsomest manner from the first, and Julia's kitten was discovered, at an early stage of luncheon, to be established on Sir Wilfrid's knee. Before that time, however, and when he had not yet nearly come to an end of his description of John's bungalow, he had paused in his discourse to the three listeners, arrested by the swift approach of a carriage, with servants in mourning liveries, which passed the bow-windows, and drew up at the porch.

"Here comes Janet!" exclaimed the sisters, simultaneously, and with an apology to Sir Wilfrid, they hurried out of the room, leaving Julia to explain. This she did in a few words, being anxious to cross-question Sir Wilfrid a little on her own account.

"Miss Monro," he repeated; "I have heard that name lately. I have some notion about it that I cannot get at."

"Very likely Captain Dunstan may have mentioned it. Miss Monro lived at Bevis, with Mrs. Drummond, who left him the property. She has just come from Bevis now."

"Oh, that's it," said Sir Wilfrid. "I remember now, and it is another instance of there being only half-a-dozen people in the world. How very odd that I should meet the young lady here! Dunstan did not seem to know much about her. Does she make any stay?"

"I believe this is to be her permanent home," Julia replied, and led the conversation back to Ceylon. She was rather curious all the time to see the new-comer; and when Miss Monro, accompanied by the old ladies, entered the room, Julia met her with a welcome as kindly, if not so familiar, as their own. The thought, suggested by her first look at the stranger's face, was:

"They said she was no beauty! Where are their eyes?"

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile's eyes were not straying any more than Julia's own, and they revealed to him a woman very different from what his notions would have been, had he formed any, of the girl whom Edward Dunstan had hardly thought important enough to mention. They revealed to him a figure of perfect proportions, with a modest, antique sort of dignity in all its lines, and a face whose chief characteristic was harmony. From the lustrous line of the temples, from which the chestnut-brown hair, golden-spotted at the roots, swept back in ripples of natural curl, to the soft but decided line of the full, delicate chin, Janet Monro's face had the suave symmetry and accord that mark the sacred paintings of some of the old Italian masters. The mouth was sweet and serious, but not small, nor were the lips full-coloured; the complexion was soft and varying, not brilliant; and the steadfast, dark-gray eyes had an expression of ineffable purity and unworldliness which might well suggest the comparison of the face with something unseen, the highest to which our imagination can reach—that we call "angelic." A low, musical voice and quiet ways—natural, no doubt, but also intensified by the quietude of her life and the nature of her recent duties—added to the charm of Janet Monro, which was widely different from the order of attraction in vogue.

To Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, who adhered to his first idea, she seemed a creature of another world.

"There is hardly anybody I know who wouldn't look like a stage *soubrette* beside her," was the candid admission of Julia to herself, before she had been an hour in Miss Monro's company.

The day passed pleasantly away; the little party, composed of such seemingly incongruous materials, got on so well together, that Sir Wilfrid Esdaile reflected with satisfaction on the increase of his knowledge of the geography of Suffolk, by which he had become aware that he had merely to drive over from Bury House to Bevis so as to keep his

engagement with Dunstan on the 10th, and thereby should gain a day The night came, and closed in around Janet Monro; back again in the former home of her school-girl days, as much alone in the world as in that past time—a woman with a secret.

CHAPTER XIV

UNEVENTFUL.

THE circumstances under which the oddly-constituted party at Bury House had met together, rendered it more than usually probable that each member of it should discuss the others in private meditation or in *tête-à-tête* confidences. There was something more in the meeting between Julia Carmichael and Sir Wilfrid Esdaile than the openly-avowed interest of love on the girl's part, and friendship on the man's, for a common object. There was Dunstan's share in the mutual curiosity with which they regarded each other. Julia wanted to learn all Sir Wilfrid could tell her about Dunstan, without letting him know anything about her cousin's love-story, while Sir Wilfrid wanted to discover whether Miss Carmichael knew of the unfortunate meeting at Southampton, which, to say the least of it, had introduced an element of awkwardness into the relations of all concerned.

The Misses Sandilands were untroubled by any double motive for the heart-felt pleasure with which they welcomed their guest, and discussed his looks, his bearing, and all the small incidents of so eventful a day. It is not uncommon for persons who lead very calm and routine lives—of the kind which other people would describe as horribly dull—to break their bounds, to do so at all with more freedom and less misgiving than lookers-on would suppose possible.

This was the case with the old ladies. Their guest was a young man of rank and fashion; no one at all like him had ever visited Bury House before; the only society they had to offer him was that of two girls, of whom one was as

little accustomed as themselves to meet young men of rank and fashion. But they did not trouble themselves, they had no misgivings respecting what they were to do for Sir Wilfrid's entertainment during six days, and whether their cook was up to the mark of his requirements.

In a very short time they had satisfied themselves that he was just what his frank and kindly acceptance of their invitation, added to John's praises of him, had led them to expect, and they felt perfectly easy in their orderly, respectable, unimaginative minds.

To Janet Monro the accident of Sir Wilfrid Esdaile's presence at Bury House was unimportant. She had never heard his name before; and though she would perhaps have preferred that the first hours of her return to her former home under such altered circumstances should not have been accompanied by such a demand on her cheerfulness as the presence of two strangers, she hardly gave the matter a thought. The concentration of her own thoughts, the division between her external and her internal life, were too complete to be affected by the casual presence of other people. Julia Carmichael seemed to her a lively, nice-looking girl, on whose face might be read full contentment with her lot. Of her history Janet knew nothing; it would doubtless be a pleasant one to know, if acquaintance were to ripen into confidence on Julia's part, and she should choose to put in words the smiling hopefulness that brightened her eyes and tuned her voice.

Janet Monro gave no more thought to Julia and Sir Wilfrid, when, half reclining on the wide window-seat of the former school-room, she gazed out into the still autumnal night. With nightfall the wind had died away, and not a leaf of the dry foliage still remaining on the twin elms stirred; the rustling of the young owls in their nest in the ivy on the gable which rose above the broad window was audible, also the gentle murmur of a little stream which ran under a rustic bridge between the kitchen-garden and

the orchard. The moon was high in the steel-coloured sky, and the cold radiance was very clear. Janet Monro gazed long upon the quiet scene, once so familiar, so commonplace in its features, presenting so strong a contrast to the broad lands and stately aspect of Bevis. She had opened wide the casement, and extinguished her candles, and, with a shawl folded round her, was engaged in the usually unprofitable and regretful task of retrospection, whose course had led her far away from Bury House and its inmates, when she was recalled to the present by the odour of tobacco which came floating in through the casement, and, catching her unaccustomed nostrils, made her sneeze. She looked out and upwards, and perceived that the casement above her own, up in the ivy, and with the owls in its near neighbourhood, was also thrown open; thereupon she softly drew back and closed the window.

"They have put Sir Wilfrid Esdaile in the long room," she said to herself, "and he is smoking out of the window, like Jim Crawley."

Janet had guessed rightly. The intuition of his hostesses had not extended to the providing of a smoking-room for Sir Wilfrid; and he had resorted to the expedient of the unhappy nephew of the immortal Miss Crawley, on that memorable occasion when he fought his cousin Pitt, the pamphleteer and diplomatist, "without the gloves." Sir Wilfrid Esdaile was not only smoking a cigar at his open casement, with all the zest of a man who has been deprived of that solace for several hours, but he was thinking of the identical person who detected him. The long room seemed to its new occupant a charming, quaint, old-fashioned apartment, with its chintz hangings—real, legitimate chintz, no modern imitation, but a pattern in which the five colours duly asserted themselves—its venerable embossed Japanese screens, dating from a period when romance and mystery still shrouded the land of the Rising Sun, and its old-fashioned toilet-table with

painted wreaths, and allegorical mirror frame. The scent of sweet lavender was in the air, and the luxury of scrupulous cleanliness was everywhere.

Sir Wilfrid had meant to write a few lines to Edward Dunstan that night, but he did not feel inclined; he would write to-morrow. Dunstan would be amused at the notion of his being domiciled with the Misses Sandilands, and two young ladies, both old acquaintances of Edward's, if indeed by this time he had come back to a mood which would permit him to be amused at anything. Meantime, Sir Wilfrid put his impressions of the day together. These were, on the whole, very pleasing; he, no more than the old ladies, felt any solicitude as to how he should get through the six days of his visit. It was not in his nature to suffer from ennui; he had the accommodatingness of good health, good temper, and a decided taste for novelty. He was not thinking about himself at all, as he leaned out of the casement up among the ivy, and he dismissed with brief consideration the ostensible objects of his visits to Bury House, to dwell upon the unexpected element of interest that had been imported into it.

It was not only that Janet Monro had seemed to him a beautiful woman; that would not have impressed him so much, for he had seen many beautiful women in many countries, but that there was something about her unlike all the other beautiful women he had ever seen—something which put her beauty, as it were, aside, and out of the question, and removed herself from the level of the ordinary world. He could find no word for it but the first that had come into his thoughts, only a few minutes after his first sight of her; he could by no means force himself to think of her in relation to the little he knew of her past history, or in any comparison or company with even the fairest, or those whom he believed to be the best women of his acquaintance.

Only half a day had gone over since he had seen her

face for the first time, and he had spoken but little with her; there had been no time for the dispersion of the earliest newness of acquaintance; but already Sir Wilfrid Esdaile felt that he saw in her face and heard in her voice something that was not seen or heard by the others.

When he turned his thoughts for a moment from the great charm of her, it was to recall precisely what Dunstan had said about her, what was her share in those occurrences at Bevis that had suddenly become invested with interest for him. He could remember nothing but a trivial allusion to her, and recalling it, he felt about Miss Monro as he had felt about John Sandilands—a sense of wonder and discontent at the strange and contradictory ordering of the fate of human beings in this world.

According to the little he knew of her story, destiny was very hard upon this girl; if dependence was no longer her lot, at least it lay in extreme obscurity and companionship of the narrowest kind. A life bounded by Bury House, with only a regretful memory of Bevis to vary it! He had been talking of his travels during the evening, but without any mention of Captain Dunstan, and the bright eagerness with which she put the few pertinent questions that showed him how familiar she was, by the medium of books, with the scenes of which he was speaking, recurred to his memory, making him think impatiently of the fetters that were on her life, and the absolute freedom that belonged to himself.

Captain Dunstan's mention of Miss Monro had been so slight that Sir Wilfrid could not make sure whether he had understood him to say that he was personally acquainted with her. "Quite a lady, you know, and all that sort of thing," was as nearly as he could remember what had been said; the phrase seemed to Sir Wilfrid ludicrously inapplicable. "Quite a lady," condescendingly said about that benign and lofty creature; what could Dunstan have been thinking about? He was an uncommonly good fellow,

and anything but a fool, but he certainly was not a trustworthy observer of women. To think that he could rave and sulk, almost break his heart, and altogether curse his fortune about Laura Chumleigh, and talk of Miss Monro as "quite a lady!"

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile subdued his irritation with his friend's obtuseness by making up his mind that Dunstan could not have seen Miss Monro; he must have spoken merely on hearsay; the careless mention of a dependent by a disagreeable old woman, as no doubt Mrs. Drummond had been.

Janet Monro was the first to appear at the breakfast-table on the following morning, and she made use of the opportunity to suggest to Miss Susan Sandilands that Sir Wilfrid Esdaile would be made happier by being licensed to smoke in the porch. He came into the room immediately after she had spoken, and Miss Susan addressed him with the gravest apologies, and the unnecessary assurance that it was their being so ignorant of the ways of gentlemen that had led to his having to forego his cigar on the previous day; but, she added, if he had only mentioned it!

Sir Wilfrid thanked her, and Miss Susan proceeded to inform him that it was Miss Monro who had reminded her.

"Indeed," said Sir Wilfrid, turning to Janet with a smile, "I am very much indebted to you; though I think I should have asked leave on my own account, as Miss Sandilands is bent on spoiling me. But how did you find out that I smoked?"

"The scent of your cigar came in at my window last night," she answered. "Don't apologise. I happen to like it very much."

So she had been looking out upon the same scene at the same hour that had witnessed his meditations of the night before. What an absurd satisfaction the discovery afforded him! This was a very little incident, but somehow it seemed to make them better acquainted. Sir Wilfrid took his place beside Miss Monro. Julia made her appearance

shortly afterwards, and the three younger members of the party discussed with great animation a programme of very mild amusement for the day; while the two old ladies beamed on them with smiles of the serenest satisfaction.

Janet remembered all the points of view to which Julia proposed that they should conduct Sir Wilfrid; they had been the scenes of the excursions of her school-days—the ruins, and the mill-race, the elm avenue, the old grange, with the moat which was a favourite resort for pic-nic parties, the remains of the Saxon church, and two show-places which were open to the public on certain days of the week. Julia was amused at the notion of taking Sir Wilfrid, in the unusual character of one of the public, to behold these grand spectacles.

"There," she said, after she had scribbled a list of what she called "the lions" on a card, and was checking it off on her fingers, "I think that is about all we can do for you; and we must not run too recklessly through our resources. We'll do the elm avenue this afternoon. The morning we shall devote to the reception and installation of Miss Monro's piano."

Sir Wilfrid agreed gaily, and then said to Julia:

"You know my ignorance of the geography of Suffolk. Is there, by any chance, in this part of the county a place called The Chantry?"

Julia could not tell him, but Miss Sandilands said:

"No; The Chantry is on the other side of Bury."

"Ah! then I need not trouble myself about it at present. I can get there from Bevis."

Miss Monro turned her head quickly, with a look of inquiry, but did not speak. He answered the look.

"I am going from hence to Bevis. I am to join Captain Dunstan on the 10th."

"You know Captain Dunstan, then?"

"Very well indeed. We have been travelling together. I was with him at Ceylon."

There was no change in Janet Monro's face perceptible to the others; but Sir Wilfrid Esdaile knew in an instant that there was something agitating to her in the allusion, and he immediately began to explain to Julia who the people at The Chantry were, and how he was charged with the ugliest set of shell ornaments to be had in all Ceylon, for a good deal of money, for Miss Ainslie.

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile became interesting to Miss Monro from the moment she found that there was any link of association between him and Bevis, and the circumstance rendered the companionship of the two girls and the young man pleasanter and easier, because the themes on which Sir Wilfrid could discourse with the best certainty of acceptance by Julia were interesting also to Miss Monro.

It was during their afternoon excursion to the elm avenue, as the three walked under the great arch formed by the noble trees, and which stretches for more than a mile, with broad, grassy paths on either side of the wide, smooth road, that Sir Wilfrid told the story of Dunstan's reception of Mr. Cleeve's letter, and the sudden revulsion that had been caused by the turn of the wheel of fortune in his favour. And then Julia asked the question which he had been wishing to put to Miss Monro:

"You know Captain Dunstan, of course?"

"Yes. He passed some time at Bevis on three occasions since I went to live there."

"I never saw a man more amazed at anything," said Esdaile. "He declares that he cannot in the least account for Mrs. Drummond's change of purpose. He spoke with great fairness, I thought, under all the circumstances, both of the admiral and of her, but he maintained that she never liked him when she had opportunities of seeing him, and could not have changed her mind subsequently. I dare say it was a case of mutual misunderstanding," added Sir Wilfrid, closely observant of the flush on Miss Monro's cheek and her look of distress, "and if Mrs.

Drummond had lived until Dunstan's return to England, she would have acknowledged him as her heir. It was certainly an act of justice."

"It was, indeed," said Miss Monro, "an act of simple, absolute justice. Let me assure you, Sir Wilfrid, as you are interested about it, being Captain Dunstan's friend, that, in so far as I was in Mrs. Drummond's confidence, I can answer for her kindly feelings towards him. When you are with him at Bevis I hope you will tell him this, and—and induce him to let her wishes be observed in certain things that the people who are there can explain to him."

There was a slight trembling in her voice, and she had walked on unconsciously, while speaking, with a quicker step. Julia was regarding her closely, and with approbation.

"Let me assure you," said Sir Wilfrid, quickly, "that Dunstan is the last person in the world to be insensible to anything of that kind. He really is a very good fellow, Miss Monro. I fancy you don't know much of him. I dare say he did not show to advantage at Bevis; and I am sure he would be more than ready to acknowledge it was his own fault. But I don't know a finer fellow, and he has such a kind heart. I am sure he would be most scrupulous in carrying out any wishes of Mrs. Drummond's, and only too grateful to any one who would inform him of them."

She had turned her head slightly away, and she said, without looking towards him:

"I believe the housekeeper at Bevis could tell Captain Dunstan anything of the kind which he might wish to know."

Her tone of extreme reserve prevented Sir Wilfrid from asking her any of the questions that suggested themselves, and he began to speak of his journey home from Ceylon with Dunstan.

On the return of the walking party to Bury House, Miss Monro withdrew to her own room, and was not again

visible until dinner. Nothing could be less exciting, less eventful than the passing away of that day, which ended with some music and a rubber—the latter for the special gratification of the old ladies. Julia played whist respectably, having learned the art in order to come to the aid of her uncle, whose generally-thwarted existence enjoyed the one great alleviation of whist. Miss Monro knew nothing about cards, and she sat apart at the piano while the others played, touching the keys softly and dreamily, and producing what one at least of the little party would have been ready to pronounce "wonderful melodies."

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile was not greatly in the habit of self-contemplation ; he rarely wondered much at finding things as they happened to be, but lived his life after an easy-going fashion, fulfilling with tolerable fidelity the philosophical counsel of Mrs. Gamp : "Take 'em as they come and as they go ;" and thus he did not think of the oddity of his actual situation as he sat playing whist for love with two old ladies and a girl in a quiet old country house. The situation amused Julia not a little, and she promised herself to make it very amusing in the recital to her constant correspondent, John, who particularly admired her style of letter-writing. To judge by Sir Wilfrid's goodwill, he might never have known or desired any livelier or more exciting pastime ; and if there had been ever so small a portion of the hearts of Miss Sandilands and Miss Jane unwon by their nephew's friend, they would have surrendered at discretion when the second day of his visit at Bury House came to a close.

The tracing back of effects to their causes, the contemplation of the links in the chain of circumstances, are processes more frequently written or talked about than actually carried out. We shrink from them. They go on sometimes in the recesses of our brain, involuntarily, and they make us impatient, because pain, regret, repining, are

their invariable accompaniments. When we disentangle all the threads of the has been we are forced to think of the might have been; we are confronted with the "if," and know how true is the definition of it as "a jailer to bring forth some monstrous malefactor." It befell two of the three guests at Bury House on that quiet, uneventful day to be forced to look back upon it afterwards with keen regret and wonder, when the time had come to each of them to think of what might have been, and what might have been averted, if——

In the meantime, Sir Wilfrid Esdaile had advanced another step towards his fate, and in friendly intimacy with Julia Carmichael. On the side of each there was a point of reserve. Julia said nothing to Sir Wilfrid Esdaile of her knowledge of the sad little love-story of Edward Dunstan and her cousin Laura—that was her cousin's secret; and Sir Wilfrid Esdaile said nothing of the meeting at Southampton, of the episode which supplied the reverse turn of the wheel of Dunstan's fortune—that was his friend's secret. The autumnal night closed in, and the moon rose upon a great calm.

CHAPTER XV

IN POSSESSION.

It was with a feeling of relief that Edward Dunstan parted for a while with Sir Wilfrid Esdaile on their arrival in London. The light-hearted equanimity that made Esdaile a delightful companion to a man of Dunstan's temperament in fair-weather times, was trying in the reverse. He fulfilled to perfection the apostolic injunction, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice;" but he had no fancy and no faculty for weeping "with them that weep." It is supposed that the latter kind of sympathy is more common than the former, but individual experience hardly bears out the general supposition, and in Esdaile's case it was natural that

he should be unable to understand the sharpness and to measure the depth of Dunstan's disappointment. A light and airy kind of sympathy, mere congratulation and good wishes, suffice for the happy, the prosperous, those whose hearts are lifted up by glad tidings; the sympathy that delicately handles grief, with that touch which helps to heal, is another thing, and is a rare endowment, of which it may be said that it never exists without acquaintance with sorrow. It was not that Sir Wilfrid did not perceive a side which might be called dramatic to the *contretemps* that had occurred in Dunstan's life; he did see it very clearly, and with the almost startled surprise that anything which has a dramatic side to it arouses in a person whose life has hitherto run in grooves of pleasant but commonplace incident; but there was nothing in his own experience to teach him the bitterness of a sentimental sorrow, nothing to make him understand how it could "take the good out of" such a reversal of misfortune as had happened to Dunstan.

When, by common though unspoken consent, they had dropped the subject of Mrs. Thornton, Sir Wilfrid Esdaile had dropped it from his thoughts, after a brief reflection that, if he could see it, it was an additional bit of luck for Dunstan that the Thorntons were going abroad. Even if they came back to London next season, and Dunstan met them, he would be all right by that time; he would have found life so much jollier with as much money as he wanted. From which sage process of thought on his part it would appear that there was concord between the views of Sir Wilfrid Esdaile concerning his friend and those of Lady Rosa Chumleigh concerning her daughter, and that neither of them regarded the woes of the affections with much seriousness or respect.

That concord arose in the respective cases of Lady Rosa Chumleigh and Sir Wilfrid Esdaile from precisely opposite causes. Lady Rosa had been in love in her time; she had seen what came of the passion when imprudently inspired

and recklessly gratified. This was the only point upon which it could have occurred to Lady Rosa that it might have been better had the Ness characteristic of imperious self-will, and the Ness faculty of trampling down every kind of opposition, been somewhat less forcibly developed in her own person. She was accustomed to watch the spreading of the Ness alliances, the widening of the Ness borders, the increase of the Ness influence in political and social spheres, with a sour jealousy, to which she gave no utterance, because to do so would have been bad policy, implying less stringency in the bonds of kinship than that which she desired should be recognised by her world, but which helped to harden her against the admission of the claims of the heart in the administration of the business and interests of life.

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile had never been in love, and his manner of regarding the sorrows of the tender passion lacked the gentleness of fellow-feeling. He had not felt the pain, and might readily believe that for his neighbour to complain was weakness; the shoe had never pinched him; he might fairly grow impatient of his neighbour's hobbling.

Though Dunstan was glad to be alone for a while, he did not regret that he had induced Sir Wilfrid to return to England with him, and to promise to accompany him to Bevis. There would be much to be done, which Dunstan had no distinct notion of how to do, and there would be many people to see who would all be charmed with Sir Wilfrid. In his bitterness of feeling, Dunstan was prepared to find himself unpopular in the neighbourhood where the admiral had been so much respected, and in his freshly put-on cynicism he was prepared not to care. What did it matter? What did anything matter? He suffered from the sense of being befooled, a pain whose seat was his hurt pride; he reddened and tingled at the remembrance of the day-dreams he had indulged in during the voyage home,

and which he had imparted to his friend with the frankness of a shy man who has conquered his shyness. Esdaile must remember them, Dunstan thought, as clearly as he remembered them himself; and how unutterably foolish he must be looking in Esdaile's eyes. Esdaile did remember them, but with no such effect; simply with the pleasant conviction that they would all realise themselves after awhile, even to the domestically-blissful portion of them, when, as he told Dunstan, he should come to believe in the right woman.

The emptiness of London was a congenial state of things to Dunstan. He did not want to meet people to whom he would have had to explain his appearance out of the season, or to be congratulated by others who might happen to know, and to remember, what had happened. He put up at an hotel, and avoided even his club, though there he might have calculated on the solitude which he would fain have found synonymous with peace.

Not the house in Lowndes Street, which Colonel and Lady Rosa Chumleigh had occupied during Dunstan's absence in India, but one in Belgrave Road, had been the scene of his brief hope and disastrous disappointment. Of course he went to see it—although he would have been highly indignant with any one who should have ventured to predict that he would do anything of the sort; and, the actual occupants being out of town, he found it much as Sir Wilfrid had found the house in Lowndes Street. Dunstan walked to and fro in front of the dusty doorsteps and the grimy windows, recalling the glimpses he had had of Laura as she came down the former, or nodded to him from the latter, and, stepping back into the road, looked sulkily at an upper window. It was that of Laura's room, where he had watched the light more than once, "like an idiot as I was," he said, in his discomfiture; then, not without a consciousness that he might have added, "and as I am," he walked away, just as he was unconsciously

attracting the attention of a policeman on the alert for symptoms of the burglarious season.

Dunstan had but little business to transact, apart from that connected with Bevis, and he got it over quickly. He could not have told exactly what he did with himself during those days. He walked a great deal in the empty parks, watched the road-mending, strolled into streets of whose existence he had previously been ignorant, stared into the windows of print-shops, and hung about bookstalls with a persistence which induced the customless vendors of wares that seem always at a discount to hope that they had caught a genuine collector, read the newspapers, and went to such theatres as were open. There was some amusement in that; there always must be after a banishment like his; the audiences themselves were something to see. He called on Mr. Cleeve at Lincoln's Inn Fields, but that eminent lawyer had left town for the long vacation. He did not care to see Mr. Cleeve particularly; he knew that all the affairs in his charge were in order, and the new owner of Bevis felt little curiosity or interest in the details. The dull days went by. If he had been going down to Bevis, as he had pictured to himself all through his homeward voyage—indeed, from the moment when he had taken in the full meaning of Mr. Cleeve's letter—to make preparations for the reception of Laura, to select her rooms and order their adornment, to get ready the shrine for the goddess whom he knew to be false but still worshipped; ah, then, indeed, time would have flown. There were moments when he hated the place, and the ownership of it; there were moments of strong temptation to him to turn his back on England without even seeing the fair-seeming heap of dust and ashes that Fate had given to him in mockery, and seek for active service in the military ranks of some power less peaceful than Great Britain. He could be a soldier once more, Dunstan thought, if only he could be certain that it would be real soldiering, not the wretched

routine that had half killed him, even while he still had hope to keep him alive.

These moods came and went; that which remained with him always was profound ennui. He thought with envy of John Sandilands, and said to himself that he should not be surprised if all this were to end in his getting out of civilised life altogether.

One day it occurred to Dunstan to look at the unset jewels which he had bought at Ceylon. What high hopes had been his that day—what a vision of Laura's dark shining eyes as they would smile upon him in guerdon of his gift, of her lithe, dimpled, dusky wrist, with the shifting soft glimmer of the mysterious oriental jewels following its quick movements. He had rejected opals, he remembered, because Laura might possibly have been weak enough to think them unlucky! What sort of luck had these soft cats'-eyes with their milky gleam brought him? When he bought them, he had felt, for the first time in his life, what it was to spend money without caring how much, and what a pleasant sensation it was. He was not just yet in a humour to reflect that a great deal of pleasure to be derived from that same source was within his reach; only the vanity and vexation of spirit that are of the essence of all human things were present to him. What should he do with these baubles? Throw them back in their box, and never look at them again? Take them to a jeweller and have them set? That would be something to do, a something painful, which jumped with his humour. Esdaile would marry some day; the cats'-eyes should be Dunstan's wedding-present to Sir Wilfrid's wife.

Dunstan took the jewels to a shop in Piccadilly, and asked to see some bracelets of the newest designs. The counter was speedily covered with beautiful and costly things, and among them was one that took Dunstan's fancy. The shopman informed him that the bracelet in question, of their own design, had been very much admired, ran glibly

through a list of names of great people who had purchased specimens of the same that season, and concluded by saying:

"We have just executed an order in cats'-eyes, which I can let you see."

He spoke to an assistant, who presently brought a box containing a velvet-covered case. A card lay in the outer box, and some plainly-written words upon it caught Dunstan's eye. They were: "Mrs. Thornton, Villa Tiberio, Naples."

Remarking that it was fortunate the bracelet had not yet been packed, the shopman opened the velvet case, and displayed the beautiful ornament within. He was not a little disappointed at the dry assent with which his own encomium on the bracelet was received, and by the abruptness with which the new customer—a natural curiosity at that time of year—told him to have the stones he left with him mounted in a similar fashion, and to send the bracelet to Bevis.

This incident did not render Dunstan more cheerful, and it supplemented in an odd sort of way the semi-superstitious feeling with which he had recalled the purchase of the precious stones.

He returned to his hotel and found a letter from Esdaile. He began by anticipating Dunstan's surprise when he should discover that Esdaile had already invaded Suffolk on his own account, and went on to give an animated account of his visit to the old ladies at Bury House, and of the resources of a place absolutely devoid of sport, and which afforded no other male society than that of a mild parson, whose notions chiefly ran on ruins and fishing. Sir Wilfrid then related how an opportunity of fulfilling John Sandilands' behest with regard to Miss Carmichael had been furnished to him by the invitation of the old ladies, as she was staying at Bury House.

"I find," he added, "that I am within ten miles of Bevis, so that I can drive over and join you on the 10th,

in time for dinner. I shall know the place as well as you do, for Miss Monro, who has taken up her abode with the Misses Sandilands, not only describes Bevis with enthusiasm, but has made some clever water-colour drawings of her favourite views."

Sir Wilfrid concluded his letter with certain instructions, relative to dogs and guns, which Dunstan received with pleasure. This would give him something to do until the time came for his going down to Bevis. He almost wished he had named an earlier day ; but he did not like to change his plan now ; it would be troublesome to the people at the place. He wished Esdaile had said more about Miss Carmichael. Laura's cousin was evidently different from Laura, for she had not only engaged herself to a poor man, but was constant to him through a long term of waiting, without any brilliant prospect at the end of it. It would be refreshing to make the acquaintance of a young lady of this uncommon kind. Perhaps, after all, Miss Carmichael was no better than the rest of them, and would throw John Sandilands over for Sir Wilfrid, if she got the chance ; but she never would get the chance. Sir Wilfrid was loyalty itself to his friends. Disappointment, jealousy, anger, spleen, and idleness had told on Dunstan's disposition, but he had not yet descended to utter scepticism. He had renounced his faith in love, but he still believed in friendship.

So poor Miss Monro was there too ! He felt rather ashamed of himself when he came upon the mention of her in Esdaile's letter. He had never thought about her since he came to England. Of course, had he found Mr. Cleeve in town, he should have remembered to ask him whether he knew what provision Mrs. Drummond had made for her companion—he never doubted that she had made some—but, as it was, he had forgotten her. It had not occurred to him, in his visions of Laura at Bevis, that one who had long lived there and loved the place had been banished from it ; and in his bitterness of spirit he had been as for-

getful and as selfish as in his joy. He did not reproach himself painfully. Dunstan's conscience was of the easy-going, tolerant kind, but he was just a little ashamed. Poor girl! Of course she must have felt the loss of her old friend, and been sorry to leave the place, especially if she was so fond of it as Esdaile said. If things had only been as he had hoped, she might have been there as much as she liked with Laura. Even as they were, he ought to be civil to her; and he was sorry he had not thought of this before. It would be a dull life for her with the two old school-mistresses, but she had not had a lively time at Bevis. He remembered that he had thought her a nice-looking girl, rather peculiar, not in his style—Dunstan's style was Laura—and with a remarkably musical voice. His last visit to Bevis, after the admiral's death, had been so unpleasant, so much against his inclination, and during it his mind had been so full of his untoward love, that he had hardly any distinct remembrance of Miss Monro in connection with it. Yes, though, he had one; it was of her beautiful playing, and the relief it afforded him, for Mrs. Drummond never wearied of it, and he had put much dreary time over him, while turning the leaves of Miss Monro's music books, and thinking uninterruptedly of Laura. He hoped she had been placed by Mrs. Drummond above the necessity of becoming a companion to some other old lady who might be more intolerable; what Esdaile said of her having "taken up her abode at Bury House" looked like it. He wished now that he had written to her, and ascertained her wishes about her movements, he felt uncomfortable at the reflection that she might possibly have still been at Bevis when he wrote to the housekeeper, and thus been made to feel herself completely ignored.

What a blunder he had made! It could not be undone, however, and the only way in which he could repair it in a measure was by getting Esdaile to introduce him at Bury House at the earliest opportunity. Afterwards, he promised himself, he would not fail in civility to Miss Monro.

As, however, his negligence could not be atoned for by a message sent through a third party, he made no allusion to Miss Monro in his brief reply to Esdaile's letter.

On the following day Dunstan went out with more cheerful feelings. He had Esdaile's commissions to execute, a visit to his own tailor to make, and a new play to see at the always-open Gaiety Theatre. He was not a whit happier, but he was not so much bored, and he was beginning to regard his going to Bevis with less distaste. The sight of the place would set his wounds bleeding again, no doubt, but what matter? He wondered how long Miss Carmichael meant to remain at Bury House. It would never do to miss her. Of course she was in constant correspondence with her cousin. He wondered whether Laura had ever told her anything about him. If she had not, Miss Carmichael would speak freely of Laura to him, for he was certain that Esdaile had said nothing. The vehemence of Dunstan's anger was beginning to subside; the old longing for the forbidden fruit was taking its place. That Laura never could be anything to him, his friend had represented to him, and he had acknowledged; but he wanted to hear of her; and he was angry with himself when he remembered the disdain with which he had rejected that true womanly suggestion of hers that they might assume the relative position of "old friends."

The arrival of the new owner of Bevis was effected in a quiet and unostentatious manner; nevertheless, the fact that Captain Dunstan had arrived became known with great celerity, owing to his having encountered at the railway station a lady and a gentleman who immediately claimed acquaintance with him. They were Mr. Ainslie and his daughter Amabel, and they were going down to The Chantry. Miss Ainslie was emphatic in her congratulations, her expressions of pleasure at meeting him again, and her satisfaction at the realisation of her first notion about him, *i.e.*, that he was coming home to Bevis.

"You see I was quite right after all," she said; "I am

always right about people, somehow; I always know whether they're going to be lucky or unlucky I can't explain it, and mamma says it's nonsense. Papa is a little afraid of it, and thinks it may be second-sight, inherited from my Scotch ancestors. All I know is that I do have notions about people, and that they're never wrong. I felt you were in for a run of luck, even when you had the spell of fever."

Dunstan laughed, and helped Miss Ainslie into the carriage. Her papa, who looked as brown and sun-dried as ever, but rather more dejected, followed her, and then Dunstan stepped in.

"It is a large item in the run of luck to have met you and Mr. Ainslie to-day," he said. "How do you come to be in London?"

"We are furnishing," said Mr. Ainslie, in his dismal way, "and Amabel makes me go up to town every ten days or so to see suites, and specimens of decorative art, and things I never heard of."

"Nonsense, papa, you know you like it. You must come to see us very soon at The Chantry, Captain Dunstan, and you will be so pleased that you will want to turn Bevis out of windows and in again. But now that my parcels are disposed of, and I am comfortably settled, you must tell me all your adventures since we said good-bye at Galle. Never mind papa; he can't talk in a train, but he's deeply interested, I assure you."

Dunstan gave the vivacious young lady a brief account of his doings, and on her questioning him as to his motive for delaying in London instead of visiting his newly-acquired property at once, he said frankly that he hated the idea of coming down to a big place like Bevis all alone, and had waited until a friend could join him.

"Where's the friend, then?" asked Miss Ainslie, with a comical look; "have you dropped him on the platform?"

Dunstan explained that circumstances had prevented

their coming down together, but that his friend would join him in the evening.

"I am speaking of Sir Wilfrid Esdaile," he added. "He had not the pleasure of seeing you when we landed at Galle. We came home together, and Mr. Gilchrist entrusted a parcel for you to his care."

"Yes, I know; Mr. Gilchrist talked of him, and would call him 'Tom Esdaile's boy' You remember, papa?"

Mr. Ainslie remembered, but was not interested.

"Bring him to The Chantry as soon as you can, Captain Dunstan. I am dying to know what it is my dear old godfather has sent me; and I should like to see Sir Wilfrid Esdaile on his own account. Somehow I fancy, from what Mr. Gilchrist said, I shall not see the lucky look about him."

"There you have made a bad shot," said Dunstan, "for Esdaile is the spoiled child of good fortune, the happiest and the best fellow I ever knew."

"You do not look so wonderfully happy as I should have expected," Miss Ainslie was thinking, while she talked about the neighbourhood, and the country, and gave Dunstan so much information, that he was lost in wonder at her having learned so much in so short a time. At a station before that for Bevis Mr. Ainslie and his daughter left the train, and Dunstan was alone for the remainder of the journey.

A carriage was waiting for him, and a few bystanders looked curiously at him as he passed through the little station. The respectful salutations of the coachman and footman, strangers to him, formed his sole welcome; and it was with a sense of solitariness which overbore the natural excitement of the occasion that the new master of Bevis approached his stately home.

It was already late, and Edward Dunstan had time only for a brief interview with the housekeeper, and a general approval of the rooms prepared for his occupation, before Sir Wilfrid Esdaile arrived.

CHAPTER XVI.

ENIGMATICAL.

No man, however hard he had otherwise been hit by fate, could have contemplated, in the character of its owner, so fair an estate as that of Bevis without exultation. The place was beautiful and admirably kept: the house was spacious, luxurious, and not oppressively grand; the arrangements indoors and out of doors met with the approval of the new master, and of his more experienced friend. Dunstan found much more to admire in it all than he had previously recognised, and Sir Wilfrid declared the description that Dunstan had given of the place inadequate to its merits and beauties. Miss Monro, he said, had a far truer sense of the picturesqueness of the park, the venerableness and variety of the trees, the importance and scientific ordering of the gardens, and succession-houses. Dunstan had not made a point of the beautiful expanse of velvet lawn and rich meadows, falling gently to the thickly-wooded horizon, commanded by the terrace on which the windows of the chief rooms opened; and it was Esdaile who told him, when on the following morning they surveyed this noble sweep of land, that the great trees on the lawn had each its respective name; that the mighty oak which spread its branches on the right was called King Alfred, and its fellow on the left was Charlemagne.

Dunstan had grown so heartily tired of his own society, that he would have hailed with delight a less welcome companion than Esdaile, and on the preceding evening he had talked with animation of all they were to see and to do on the morrow. He foresaw that reforms and additions would be required in the department of the stables: neither the admiral nor Mrs. Drummond had known or cared anything at all about horses, and such animals as might have been retained on the establishment would no doubt be of the kind

dear to dowagerhood. This was a topic on which the friends were in thorough harmony; Esdaile was a good judge of horses, and was pleased to find that Dunstan had recovered his spirits sufficiently to discuss the purchase of hunters with befitting eagerness.

The subject was resumed at breakfast, and it was pursued until Esdaile's attention was distracted by a sharp tapping at a window. He looked up, and rose.

"There is Argus," he said; "he has found us out without delay."

"Argus? Oh, a peacock! What a beauty!" said Dunstan, as Esdaile raised the window-sash and scattered bread upon the grass for the gorgeous bird.

"He won't eat from my hand just at first," said Esdaile, "but he will come to that soon. He is very tame."

"How do you know about him and his ways?"

"Miss Monro told me. She was in the habit of feeding him every morning, and he would follow her about from window to window, and come to her when she went out on the lawn."

"Let us cultivate him, then," said Dunstan. "I like pets, and all the better when they're ready-made; they are less trouble."

He joined Esdaile at the window, and then it was that Esdaile told him the names of the great oak-trees.

"Argus's favourite roost is one of the lower branches of Charlemagne," he added.

"Miss Monro must have christened the trees herself," said Dunstan; "there wasn't much fancifulness about Mrs. Drummond. I dare say she had a great liking for the place, though her life must have been an awfully dull one.

"She seems to have more than a liking for it," said Esdaile. "I should say she loved the place dearly, if one is to judge by the accuracy of her description, the minuteness of her observation, and the expression of her face when she is talking of Bevis."

"You must have had about enough of Bevis before you came here," said Dunstan, whose uncomfortable feelings with reference to Miss Monro every word of Esdaile's was increasing.

"Not at all. We were all interested in Bevis, and I was particularly glad to learn what I could about the place and the people, because I saw that Miss Monro was very anxious that the former ways should not be departed from in certain respects, and I even ventured to give her some assurances on that head. I thought I might answer for you."

"Of course you might," said Dunstan; "I shall be very glad to do anything that is right—I suppose Miss Monro means about charities and old servants, and matters of that kind. I dare say Mrs. Drummond left some expression of her wishes with her; she would be likely to do that, not trusting me much on any subject, and thinking they would be more binding on me if they came to me from another person."

"Not trusting you much on any subject," repeated Esdaile. "What an extraordinary fellow you are, Dunstan! Here's the old lady leaving you the whole of her property, and yet you believe she would not credit you with what it is to be hoped is not a very uncommon degree of good feeling. I really cannot make you out, or come at your notion of Mrs. Drummond. It is singularly unlike Miss Monro's, at all events."

"Did Miss Monro say much about her?" asked Dunstan.

"Not very much as to quantity, probably because the loss which she feels so deeply is so recent, but a great deal as to meaning; and I gathered from all she said that a deep attachment subsisted between the old lady and herself. No doubt she was not very easy to get on with, for people in general, but Miss Monro found the way to her heart. But you have put me off what I was saying about your own unaccountable notions."

"Unaccountable or not, I cannot relinquish them. I suppose nothing was said by Miss Monro to throw light on the motives that led Mrs. Drummond to make that will?"

"Nothing whatever that would jump with your idea, which is, so far as I can make it out, that a sensible and self-willed woman, who never liked you, who prevented your uncle from leaving you the property to which you were the natural heir, and who went on disliking you to the end of her days, was induced by some powerful motive, about as reasonable as witchcraft, to bequeath Bevis to you. Miss Monro made but one allusion to the matter, and then she said that it was an act of absolute justice."

"You may think me as obstinate and as wrong-headed as you please," rejoined Dunstan, "but I hold to my own opinion. Mrs. Drummond thought no better of me at last than she did at first, and there is something under all this."

"So be it then," said Esdaile, "I shall not dispute the matter with you. Only I should not trouble myself, if I were you, about what may be under such an uncommonly prepossessing surface as this." He waved his hand towards the lawn.

A discreet knock at the door interrupted the dialogue at this point, and Mrs. Manners presented herself.

"I understood that I was to wait on you at ten o'clock, sir?" said the housekeeper, looking like a model of propriety and punctuality, and directing a momentary glance at a timepiece which marked the first quarter beyond that hour.

"Certainly, certainly, Mrs. Manners," answered Dunstan, "and I am quite ready to attend to you."

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile lighted a cigar—not without consciousness of a cold displeasure in the gaze of Mrs. Manners, who regarded the act as an inauguration of those "other times" which she must school herself to endure, with an ample reserve of the privilege of lamentation over the good old ones—and stepped out upon the terrace.

Dunstan had a meagre notion of the sort of business which he should have to discuss with his housekeeper. He remembered that the personage who had filled that responsible post at Bevis, when he was a little boy, had seemed to him an awful being, of whom those whom he feared were more afraid than he was of them. Mrs. Manners did not look a bit more likely to "stand any nonsense" than her majestic and implacable predecessor, and Dunstan felt very much as if he were a little boy again in her presence, and was aware that she knew all about his ignorance. He had a happy inspiration; he would begin by a declaration of confidence, and ask to be allowed to take things for granted; this would be a way of escape for him, and a propitiation of her. So having requested Mrs. Manners to be seated, he addressed her in the pleasant, taking way that had seldom been resisted, except by Mrs. Drummond, and told her that he was equally unacquainted with the details of an establishment like that of Bevis, and persuaded that under her superintendence they were managed to perfection. She had filled to the satisfaction of Mrs. Drummond the responsible position she now held, and Captain Dunstan had great pleasure in confirming her in it.

Now he hoped Mrs. Manners would thank him and retire; but he had to learn that the good woman's sense of her own duty extended to the making of other people do theirs, if possible, and that she had no notion of letting him off. His confession of ignorance—although she thought it becoming that a gentleman like him should know nothing about the matters which lay within her province—had put her on her mettle and on her honour.

"I am much obliged to you, sir," said Mrs. Manners, getting off her chair to make a stiff curtsey, and remaining on her feet to signify that she meant business; "but I should not be comfortable unless you knew exactly how things are in the house, and my system had your sanction, as it had that of my former employers."

"Very well, Mrs. Manners," said Dunstan, resignedly, and casting a regretful glance at Esdaile's figure as it vanished behind the spreading branches of Charlemagne; "I am ready to listen to all you have to say to me, if it's any satisfaction to you, but I approve of your system beforehand."

"And now, sir," said Mrs. Manners when she had imparted to Dunstan all the particulars respecting his own household which she thought necessary, "I have only to hand over to you the books Miss Monro left in my charge, and to take your orders about the rooms."

"What books do you allude to?" asked Dunstan.

Mrs. Manners requested him to accompany her to the library, where she unlocked the cabinet containing the inventories, and pointed them out to him.

"They were all written by Miss Monro," she said, "at Mrs. Drummond's request. She was entirely in her confidence, and had the whole authority

This observation gave Dunstan the opportunity for which he had been wishing. He could ask the housekeeper the questions he had not liked to put to Esdaile.

"Miss Monro must have taken a great deal of trouble," he said. "Did she remain in the house by herself after Mrs. Drummond's death? Had she no friends near?"

"She stayed until your letter to me came; then she packed up and left. She had only been once out of the place before, when she went, I believe, to see the ladies from whom she came. As to friends, sir, there never was any company here, and Miss Monro hadn't the chance of many."

Mrs. Manners eyed her master closely while she answered his questions. She had not forgotten her notion that he was not disposed to be very civil to Miss Monro.

"I had no idea there was any one here," said Dunstan, and his face expressed the vexation that he felt. "I would have consulted Miss Monro's convenience if I had known.

I hope every arrangement was made for her comfort—in the removal, I mean?"

"She had the carriage, sir," answered the housekeeper, "and her things were packed and sent by our people. There were three cases of books, and the piano, and in this"—Mrs. Manners placed one of the inventories on a table at Dunstan's elbow, and opened the thin volume at a page on which several entries were made in a handwriting not Miss Monro's—"there is a list of the articles which Mrs. Drummond gave to Miss Monro, made out and signed by Mrs. Drummond herself." Mrs. Manners turned the page at which Dunstan had glanced, and showed Mrs. Drummond's signature with a date appended to it. This date was a little earlier than that of the will.

"Yes, yes, all quite right," said Dunstan, closing the book hastily, "but I mean more than that. Was there anything Miss Monro would have wished done? This was her home, you know, for a number of years, and she—you must be familiar with her ways, and those of Mrs. Drummond."

"Miss Monro knew more of my late mistress's ways than I did," responded Mrs. Manners, primly; "she was a very distant lady to all but one. I could not undertake to say anything about her wishes, except as regards the management of the house, and she entirely approved of my system."

"Well, then," said Dunstan, who wanted to escape from the system, "if things go on just as usual, I suppose it will be all right."

Mrs. Manners replaced the inventory in the cabinet, and ceremoniously handed the key to Captain Dunstan.

"I am prepared to answer for my own department that it will be all right, sir. I have only to trouble you farther on one point. Miss Monro said your instructions were to be taken about the use of the admiral's corridor."

"The admiral's corridor? I don't understand."

"The rooms on the south side, those which were chiefly used by the admiral and Mrs. Drummond. As to whether they should be used or not for the present?"

"Certainly not. There are many more rooms than will be wanted for many a day without meddling with those. Is there anything more, Mrs. Manners?"

"Only one thing, sir," replied the housekeeper, with a little additional demureness, as she took something from the pocket of her black-silk apron. "Miss Monro left this in my charge, with directions that it was to be put into your own hand, according to the wish of Mrs. Drummond."

So saying she placed in Captain Dunstan's hand the small packet resembling a ring-box in size and shape, that she had locked up in her cash-box on the day of Miss Monro's departure from Bevis.

"Mrs. Drummond's wish!" Dunstan repeated, in surprise, as he narrowly inspected the little parcel.

"Yes, sir, so Miss Monro said."

Dunstan laid the small packet on the table beside him, and so manifest was his intention not to inspect its contents until he should be alone, that Mrs. Manners had no choice but to retire.

Dunstan sat looking at the little packet with an unaccountable disturbance in his face. It was a message from the dead. Did it contain any clue to the mystery of his good fortune? The last words exchanged between him and Mrs. Drummond had been spoken in this very room; she had been seated where he was seated now; he remembered it quite well, and also the cold politeness with which they parted. And here was a message from her, something personal, intentional, sealed with her own seal. He cut the paper round the impressions without breaking them, and found within a little cardboard-box, containing a small quantity of jeweller's cotton, on which lay a silver key of foreign construction. Dunstan removed the cotton, and looked for some scrap of writing in the box; there was nothing of the kind, either there or on the inside of the paper in which the box had been wrapped. The message from the dead was absolutely unintelligible. Dunstan examined the key closely, but could not remember that he

had ever previously seen it. Then he fell to considering what might be the object or objects under its guard which Mrs. Drummond would have been most anxious to have carefully consigned to her successor.

Family jewels, diamonds, perhaps? He had never heard of any belonging to the admiral, and he could not remember to have seen Mrs. Drummond wear any ornament except a singularly unornamental gold watch and chain. There was no mention of jewels in the papers he had received from Mr. Cleeve. Besides, this slight ill-made key was not the kind of custodian to which is confided the keeping of such valuable things as family jewels. Dunstan was just about to send for Mrs. Manners again, that he might ask her whether she recognised the key, and could throw any light on the purpose with which it had been consigned to him, when it struck him that the circumstances would afford him an opportunity for communicating with Miss Monro.

"She must know," thought Dunstan, "what it means; and if I show her that I am anxious to carry out any wish of Mrs. Drummond's, if only I can find out what it is, it will be the best apology I can offer for having totally forgotten herself.

Dunstan replaced the key in the box, and going out on the terrace, he waved his handkerchief to attract the attention of Esdaile, who was still visible on the far edge of the lawn. Esdaile came quickly towards the house, and re-entered the library by the window.

"You are over so much of your troubles," he said, "and now I suppose we can go to the stables."

"Wait a minute, here's a little puzzle to add to the big one." He showed the key to Esdaile, and told him how he proposed to discover what it meant.

"I always intended to ask you to introduce me at Bury House," he added. "I hope it will not bore you to call there soon."

"Not in the least," answered Sir Wilfrid.

CHAPTER XVII.

KATINKA.

THEIR inspection of the stables at Bevis bore out the anticipations of Captain Dunstan and Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, and afforded them a prospect of some congenial occupation. A pair of fat carriage-horses, a chubby pony, whose mission in life had been the drawing of Mrs. Drummond's wheeled-chair along the smooth paths through the park, and a fourth animal, very unlike the other three, were the only tenants of the extensive building. The carriage-horses were old acquaintances of Dunstan's, and if the chubby pony was not the same as he remembered, it was as like as a twin brother; but he was much taken with the beautiful black mare in the last stall on the right, and asked the man who was introducing him to this modest department of his new domain where she came from, and how long she had been there, with the interest such a subject might be expected to inspire. Esdaile had gone up to the beautiful creature's fine head, and was making friends with her, as it was his way to make friends with all well-conditioned animals. A white porcelain plaque, hanging on the wall over the rack, bore in blue letters the name Katinka; but this was the only case of conformity to the modern fashion of stable decoration at Bevis. Perforated stalls, ornamental matting, the æsthetic in its application to equine life, were unknown there; the stables were merely airy, spacious, and comfortable.

The mare, Captain Dunstan was informed, had been purchased by Mrs. Drummond, shortly after the admiral's death, for Miss Monro's use. She carried a lady very well, and had been a great favourite. Miss Monro had never mounted her since Mrs. Drummond's death.

Katinka was taken out of her stall, and her paces were exhibited. The two young men were much pleased with her, Dunstan especially, as the more enthusiastic of the

two in the taste for horses inbred in the Briton, and having had less opportunity of gratifying it. The mare deserved their praise, and doubtless she understood it, for her soft, sensitive muzzle went quivering about the coat-sleeves and over the chest of each of them in turn, as though she were swearing eternal friendship in her dumb but expressive fashion.

There were no orders about the horses, the coachman observed to his master, except the general orders that everything was to be kept up as usual until Captain Dunstan's arrival; but, in case there should be any intention of selling the mare, a lady in the neighbourhood had been making inquiries about her. A young lady she was, only a few weeks in the country, and she had heard of the mare through Mrs. Cathcart, the parson's lady, who used to ride out with Miss Monro sometimes. Her name was Miss Ainslie, and Mr. Ainslie had recently come to The Chantry. He, the coachman, had been asked by Mrs. Cathcart to mention the matter, as Captain Dunstan would not, that lady said, be likely to be wanting a lady's horse.

Dunstan answered carelessly that he did not know, that he would see. The man's words recalled the subject, which, indeed, strayed but seldom out of his thoughts, and then only a little way, and conjured up a vision of Laura, as he might have seen her, smiling down on him as she felt Katinka's fine mouth, and patted Katinka's shining, satiny neck.

"Plenty of room here for all you want," said Esdaile, as he and Dunstan walked out of the stable-yard, "and not a bad beginning. Mrs. Drummond knew something about horses, judging by that pair and Katinka."

"I wonder you did not know about the mare," said Dunstan, "as she was a favourite with Miss Monro. She told you of the peacock, and a lot of other things; it is odd she did not mention her. It seems rather hard on the poor girl to give up her horse, doesn't it?"

"A good many things seem rather hard upon the poor

girl," answered Esdaile, emphatically. "It seems to me Bevis was a sort of earthly paradise to her, and that she is very much to be pitied for having lost it. Your notion of her position with Mrs. Drummond—as you put it to me and Sandilands, I remember—must have been very wide of the truth."

"No doubt it was; but how was I to know that Mrs. Drummond, the coldest and most unbending of women to myself and to other people who had some claim on her, was so uncommonly kind to Miss Monro, who had none; except, indeed, that she cheerfully put up with the old lady's ways and humours. I knew nothing about it; but I am learning something new on the subject every hour since I arrived here, and, to tell you the truth, it makes me feel very uncomfortable."

"Why?"

"Because I forgot all about her—ignored her completely; and now when I see her I shall feel almost as if I had turned her out of house and home. I wish—I wonder whether she would let me make her a present of the mare?"

"Of course she would not. Why, Dunstan, just think; even if she would take her, she could not keep her at Bury House. I dare say she never spoke to me of Katinka on purpose that you should not find out she was so fond of the mare, and that she never mounted her after Mrs. Drummond's death so that she might not seem to have any kind of claim to her."

"Very likely you are right, though I never should have hit upon the explanation. I suppose that sort of thing is only proper pride; but I'm very sorry for it. I wish my good luck had not brought sorrow and trouble to any one besides myself."

"Miss Monro would have lost her home at Bevis at any rate. I do not think she will be unhappy with her old friends; and it must have been lonely for her here of late."

"She was evidently everything to Mrs. Drummond. No matter what I have spoken of, or to whom, I have heard of Miss Monro's care, Miss Monro's arrangements, Miss Monro's directions; and I cannot discover that the people disliked her either. I should have thought they would."

"Nonsense! Dunstan; you don't know her," interrupted Esdaile. "Miss Monro is much too serene and lofty a person for the sort of thing you mean. You did not take the trouble to know anything about her, except that she was rather good-looking, though not your style, when you saw her here, and I assure you she will strike you as being a very superior young lady——"

"My dear fellow, you are quite right. Perhaps I don't particularly care for superior young ladies, but I assure you I am prepared to find Miss Monro everything that is most charming of that description. Only the fact of her being so makes it more awkward instead of less awkward for me; I could so much more easily apologise to a common-place person. Who is that at the door?"

As the friends approached the house the door was opened, and the servant, perceiving them, answered the stranger's inquiry by indicating them as his master and Sir Wilfrid Esdaile respectively. The stranger, a tall, well-looking, strongly-built man of about forty, who wore a long single-breasted coat, and a felt hat with a soft crown, descended the broad doorsteps and advanced to meet them. Then Captain Dunstan recognised him as Mr. Cathcart, the Vicar of the parish, whom he had seen but once previously, on the occasion of Admiral Drummond's funeral, and the three gentlemen entered the house together.

Mr. Cathcart explained his early visit by saying that he had to leave home for a week on that afternoon, and had not wished to defer until his return the renewal of his acquaintance with Captain Dunstan, whose nearest neighbour he was. Indeed, the Vicarage garden adjoined the park-wall of Bevis. Mr. Cathcart proved to be a pleasant man, with

broad notions, though, Dunstan perceived with regret, no sporting tendencies—he did not even confess to a mild taste for fishing—and, naturally, he had just that thorough knowledge of the neighbourhood which could be made useful to a new-comer, who was anxious to be popular and to avoid mistakes.

"I have only one old acquaintance on this side of the county," said Dunstan, "and perhaps I ought not to call him so—for I only met him coming home from India—Mr. Ainslie, who has bought a little place that used to be called The Chantry."

"It is called The Chantry still," said Mr. Cathcart, "and Mr. Ainslie is my wife's uncle."

"Indeed! Then that accounts for Miss Ainslie's knowing so much about Bevis, which surprised me, I remember, when I met them coming home. More of the half-dozen people in the world, you see, Esdaile! I hope Mr. Ainslie's hopes of rural felicity will be thoroughly realised."

"H—m!" said the Vicar, dubiously; "I have not much faith in the realisation of any notions of felicity which consist of giving up the work of one's life at fifty—however, it is too soon to judge in this case. Miss Ainslie likes it, and that's an important point."

"I should think so," said Dunstan, laughing.

After a little more talk, Mr. Cathcart went away, having delivered a friendly message from his wife to the two young men, to the effect she would be glad to see them at her five-o'clock tea-table, if they were not otherwise engaged.

"And I suppose you are not," added Mr. Cathcart, "as you will hardly have made your arrangements for regular killing, here or elsewhere, as yet."

Dunstan promised, a little formally, to present himself with his friend at the Vicarage at five o'clock. It did not much matter that the parson should not care for sport, but that he should laugh, ever so mildly, at those who had the proper appreciation of that noble pursuit in all its branches,

was, to say the least of it, questionable taste. So solemnly was Dunstan, after a brief term of landed-proprietorship, beginning to take to the position.

The Vicarage was a pretty house, standing in a trim lawn with well-tended flower-beds, and greatly dignified and beautified by the aid of the noble ranges of elms that overshadowed it on two sides. These belonged to Bevis park, from which the Vicarage was separated only by a wall, so thickly clothed on both sides with ivy that it was hidden in green, and so low that from the farther, or house side, a charming uninterrupted view of the wide-spread glades and great avenues of trees was obtained. At a little distance beyond the Vicarage, and occupying the only eminence for miles around, stood the church, an ancient, much-repaired structure, surrounded by grass-grown graves and old tombstones; a solemn, peaceful building, much visited by archæologists. The church and the churchyard contrasted strongly with the Vicarage; the latter was a bright and cheerful place, the Vicar and his wife being socially inclined, and, though childless, fond of young people.

There was a neatly-kept tennis lawn behind the Vicarage house, and Mrs. Cathcart had a well-deserved reputation for the successful promotion and carrying-out of pic-nic parties. In the parish and among the poor she was active without being meddlesome, and kind without being inquisitorial—on the whole, a useful and worthy person, and just now in rather low spirits, as she was explaining to a young friend, who had come unexpectedly to see her, on the very afternoon when she had invited the new arrivals at Bevis to afternoon tea at the Vicarage.

"It is not always true," Mrs. Cathcart is saying, "that one does not know the value of anything until one has lost it; for I did know it, I thoroughly understood her usefulness, and how helpless I should feel without her. She understood everything without explanations, she managed everything without fuss; and if you knew what schools,

old women, visiting ladies, and clergywoman's business in general signifies, you would know what a help she was, and what a loss she is."

"I can guess, though I don't know much about such things," said the visitor. "I never had anything to do in India, and here I have to make out occupation for myself. There does not seem to be any place specially prepared for me, and into which nobody else would fit; and though I have things a good deal my own way, and like it, it is a little dull, even now, while it is quite new—and novelty, after India, is a fine thing, you must know, almost apart from *the kind* of novelty. I don't suppose, however, I could be of much use to you, even if I were nearer. A 'right hand' at Bevis cannot be replaced."

"Besides, you ought to help in your own parish," said Mrs. Cathcart; "there's plenty to do there when you drop into the way of doing it. No; I must only get used to my loss, and live in hope that Captain Dunstan will bring a nice wife to Bevis, and be quick about it too. An important place of that sort, without a woman at the head of it, is a misfortune."

Mrs. Cathcart glanced rather meaningly at her visitor, who was noiselessly rummaging a bookshelf during this conversation, and who now looked up at her, from the title-page of the last volume she had taken down, with frank and fearless eyes.

"I should think so," she said, "especially after such a viceroyalty as you have described. This is the book I wanted. The ponies are rested by this time, so I think I had better go."

"No, don't," said Mrs. Cathcart, and now she fired a shot with intention, and watched for its effect; "I expect a visit from Captain Dunstan presently. Mr. Cathcart called on him this morning. You may as well stay, as you know him already"

"Very well, I don't mind," replied the visitor, with

perfect unconcern; "I have seen him since he came to England, and, indeed, we came down from town together. He talked of coming over to The Chantry soon, and I hope he will do so. Papa is longing to get hold of somebody to talk India to, and though Captain Dunstan hated it, he is so good-natured he never minded papa's stories about natives, and castes, and residents, and revenue, and things."

"Very good-natured, is he? That is a good quality."

"Yes; but it is not a great one. Not that one wants people to be great, in a general way, so much as not to be small, and not to be tiresome. We liked him—at least, papa and I liked him; mamma never takes to invalids, and you know Captain Dunstan was coming home 'sick,' as they elegantly express it. He seems all right again now: cured by Bevis—and how many thousands a year is it?—no doubt."

The ingenious and hopeful idea that Mrs. Cathcart had conceived faded from her brain as Miss Ainslie uttered the foregoing sentences, in her quick, airy manner, without any change of colour or countenance.

The circumstances under which her cousin and Captain Dunstan had met were proverbially favourable to the development of the sort of mutual feeling which Mrs. Cathcart had hoped to detect; but they had failed of their ordinary effect in this case. If the fellow-travellers had indulged in a little flirtation it had plainly been a mere pastime. There was not the slightest consciousness on Miss Ainslie's part, and no doubt Captain Dunstan had escaped equally scot-free from the perilous propinquity of 'board ship. The lady of the Vicarage was a very good woman, and not a bit of a schemer, but she had thought it would be "nice" if Amabel and Captain Dunstan had taken a "fancy" to each other on that homeward voyage; especially as there would have been mingled with the niceness Captain Dunstan's sudden subsequent accession to fortune, and the date of that event would triumphantly clear the "fancy" of every element except that of true love.

If, however, Mrs. Cathcart saw nothing conscious in her cousin's face, Miss Ainslie, who was very quick, and by no means devoid of humour, detected something odd and discomfited in Mrs. Cathcart's acceptation of her remarks, and swiftly interpreting its meaning, laughed with a heartfelt merriment which made her hazel eyes sparkle, and touched up her pretty dimples bewitchingly. Mrs. Cathcart stared at the girl, who laughed only more merrily than before, threw away her book, and popping down on her knees beside the chair in which Mrs. Cathcart was sitting, said, with uplifted finger and a comical look:

"So that was your little plan, was it? And I was to have all my duties explained to me, and to be fortified by the example of the peerless Miss Monro. Oh, my cousin—deep, designing—are you one of the match-makers who haven't even the excuse of being mammas?"

"My dear Amabel, I—I don't understand—I have not said anything."

"Certainly not; you only looked unutterable things, and I found you out in a minute. Well, then, as I have found you out, I will tell you all about it."

Miss Ainslie here pulled off her bonnet, shook her bright brown locks which she wore in a becoming towzly style, off her forehead, and subsided into a comfortable sitting posture at Mrs. Cathcart's feet.

"The all I have to tell you," said she, with mischievous gravity, "is precisely nothing. If any young woman should ever attempt to make you believe that she did not flirt, just a little, and within the most strictly justifiable bounds, when going out to India or coming home therefrom, don't believe her. I have no intention of so deceiving. Never mind about going out—I was only a school-girl then, and my chaperon had a very pretty taste of her own for flirtation, so the truth is, I did not get a fair chance—coming home is the present matter in hand. Captain Dunstan would not flirt with me! There's an admission

for you! I tried to make him—I tried hard—I tried in vain! Only for a little while, I beg you to observe—unlike the British warrior of history and legend, I not only know when I am beaten, but when I am going to be; and I retired gracefully. I don't think he ever discovered my design on his peace, and we became very good friends without any preliminary stages of agitation—on his part."

"On his part, Amabel! That's an admission!"

"Not a bit of it," said Miss Ainslie, with another clearance of her bright locks from her forehead, and much destructive twisting of her bonnet-strings; "the agitation on my part, all the damage sustained, indeed, was simply to my vanity, and it was of the slightest. I could not have fallen in love with Captain Dunstan if I had tried ever so hard, or if he had been ever so ready to reciprocate, or even to anticipate, the sentiment; and therefore you may take my opinion of him as worth something. He is a good-looking, gentlemanly, superficial, good-natured young man, with something romantic and depth-suggesting in his face and manners, but he has neither romance nor depth in him. He could be obstinate, I think, and he is, I should say, of a discontented disposition; but he can be very agreeable when he likes, and, no doubt, as things have gone with him, he will like always, or almost always, at present. You will find him charming—I do, I assure you."

Mrs. Catheart shook her head.

"I don't know," she said; "your portrait does not charm me. In such a position as his there's a great deal of good or harm for a man to do, and——"

"He will do nothing but good if he's only properly managed and cleverly led; and I do believe that is the reason why I never could have cared a dump—no, that's vulgar, I withdraw the expression—a straw about him."

"Then I'm sure I wonder, considering the contradictions that are always turning up in human affairs, and especially love affairs—I wonder he did not lose his heart to you."

Miss Ainslie smiled—it was a very pretty, sly, meaning little smile—as she replied :

"It is unaccountable—or at least it would be if I had not satisfactorily accounted for it to myself. To use your own elegant expression—you have been reading old novels, I see—I feel pretty sure that when Captain Dunstan stood my fire, not only unharmed, but unconscious, he had no heart to lose."

"Really ! Then, my dear Amabel, who is she ?—and how did you find it out ?"

"I did not find it out, I only divined it ; I could not in the least tell you how, but I am as sure of the fact as of my existence. And I have not the remotest notion who she is. She isn't in India, that I am convinced of, for I did elicit from Captain Dunstan that he had never seen a woman worth looking at twice, from the time he left England until he had the good fortune, etc., etc."

Miss Ainslie supplied the conclusion of the sentence by an expressive flourish of her pretty fingers about her pretty face. And then she laughed merrily again, and, rising from her lowly position on the carpet, said, while tying her bonnet-strings :

"No, no ; she isn't in India, she's in England, and there's no good in laying any charitable little plots for the matrimonial sacrifice of Captain Dunstan to the good of the parish. And now I'm off, because the interesting being will be arriving presently, and after all this talk about him, into which you have beguiled me, I should infallibly blush, according to my detestable practice, on seeing him, and I would rather not do that."

"How absurd you are," said Mrs. Cathcart, "after what you have just said of your perfect indifference to him even while you—you——"

"Yes, just so ; but you see I feel guilty, for somehow or other I found out a secret about him, and now I've told it."

She rang the bell, and ordered her pony-carriage, and Mrs. Cathcart had to let her go.

Miss Ainslie did not, nevertheless, escape seeing Captain Dunstan, for not a hundred yards from the gate she encountered him with Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, walking towards the Vicarage. On perceiving Miss Ainslie, Dunstan stepped forward; she pulled up her ponies, and conversed with him for a few minutes without the slightest embarrassment, probably because Mrs. Cathcart was not there to look for the apprehended blush. Dunstan presented Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, and an early day was named for their joint visit to The Chantry.

As Miss Ainslie drove on, her ponies' hoofs and the bells on their collars making a pleasant merry music, the friends stood still for a few moments, looking after her.

"She is very pretty," said Sir Wilfrid Esdaile; "I don't wonder at old Gilchrist's indignant wonder that she should come back to England Miss Ainslie still. Didn't your coachman say it was she who had been asking about Katinka?"

"He meant her; he said Mrs. Cathcart would speak to me. I don't want the mare, of course; but Ainslie does not know as much about horses as he knows about pigs, and he prefers the pigs; besides, the mare's too good for a girl who rattles her ponies along at that rate."

"Much too good," said Esdaile, "and, indeed, Dunstan, I have been thinking all day of asking you to let me have her. She is just what I have been looking for, and we can easily find something to suit Miss Ainslie."

Dunstan agreed, and the "deal" was concluded before they reached the Vicarage gate.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JOHN'S PISTOL.

It was a fine breezy afternoon, and the leaves were skimming along the grassy edges of the elm-bordered high-road on which the low wooden gates that gave admission to Bury

House opened. It was a quiet road, and from the side that fronted Bury House the rich flat fields stretched away to such a distance that, looking from the house, across the lawn, and over the tall, thick, well-kept hedge that formed the boundary of the little domain, one might fancy there was no intervening space at all between it and the lands opposite. In the summer, when the leaves were very thick upon the trees, and the laurel and privet hedges were in full force, passing carts and carriages and horsemen were invisible from Bury House; and it was a "sure sign" of autumn, Miss Susan Sandilands would remark, when they could see the horses' heads, the tops of the vehicles, and the hats of the riders between the hedge and the elm branches. From the porch, and from the windows at either side of it, the old ladies were accustomed to survey the tranquil, smiling prospect with satisfaction as deep, very likely, as that of some great landed proprietor who is master of all he surveys, and also of a great deal that is out of sight. They took a lively interest in the agricultural processes to which the fair fields opposite were subjected, watched the weather with solicitude in the haymaking season, and had the highest opinion of the nutritive quality of the after-grass. The road curved at a little distance above, and again at a little distance below, Bury House, and no other dwelling was in view, so that the effect of space was pleasantly conveyed, and a touch of picturesqueness was added to the scene by a group of lofty and rather ragged trees which closed the view on one side of the house, and were peopled by a numerous colony of rooks. The trees were more picturesque than usual, for the wind was high enough to toss their shaggy heads, and, looking at them from the porch, Julia Carmichael made up her mind upon a point which she and Janet Monro had been discussing.

"I am sure he would like the Rookery best of all," said Julia; "and if you only draw it as perfectly as you have drawn the reeds and the water-hens at Bevis, he

will be able to hear the birds caw when he looks at it." The matter in hand was a drawing which Miss Monro had offered to execute for the consolation and delight of Julia's absent lover.

"You are as flattering a critic as Sir Wilfrid," said Janet, smiling, "but my vanity is kept in order by my superior knowledge."

"You mean that neither Sir Wilfrid nor I know anything about art. Well, perhaps we don't, but we know what we like, and that, in the present instance, is you and all your works. I'm sure he would have chosen the Rookery if he had been here."

"Then it shall be the Rookery, and I will begin it to-morrow."

"The best view is from John's own room," said Julia; "another reason why he will like the drawing so much. Come and see it from thence."

"With pleasure," said Janet; "I have never been in that room, I think."

"Very likely not. It was always his, but he never stayed here, after he grew up, except in the holidays, when the pupils had gone home, and the room was kept locked with all his rubbish in it. It is not locked now, and I have tidied it up."

The room was in the gable end of the house, opposite to Janet's own, on an upper floor, and the view from the ivy-framed window justified Julia's commendation. Janet contemplated the group of trees with silent and prolonged attention, which Julia imitated, but only for a few minutes. She soon found occupation in shifting the old school and college books that occupied a few shelves on the wall, and looking into them for bits of scribbling in a well-known handwriting which always had a mysterious attraction.

Presently Janet left the window, and remarking that Julia was right, the trees were grand from there, she looked about the room with some interest. It told of boyish

occupation, in the vividly-coloured sporting-prints that adorned the walls, and the implements of cricket and foot-ball that were put by in a corner. A portrait of John Sandilands, aged thirteen, a hideous example of photography in its infancy, hung above the mantelpiece. And beneath it, in the centre of the slab, was a flat, brass-bound mahogany box, at which Janet looked curiously.

"John's first pistol," said Julia, raising the lid and displaying the weapon, which reposed in its green cloth-lined receptacle, with a neat assortment of ammunition, and a little brass box of caps in appropriate cells on either side of it. "He taught me to fire at a mark with that, and I assure you I hit it most times. It's an old-fashioned thing, and he despised it, I suppose, too much to take it with him. Have you ever shot at a mark?"

Julia had the pistol in her hand now.

"No, never," answered Janet, looking at it rather askance; "I don't know anything about fire-arms, and I think I am afraid of them, even when they are not loaded."

"Nonsense," said Julia, as she slyly popped a cap in its place, and snapped it off, pointing the pistol at the photograph of John, and then repeated the action, with a childish pleasure in the noise. "How I should like to go and shoot at our old mark!" she said. "Watch, Janet, how quickly I can load this; John taught me," and she adjusted the powder and ball, drew the charge, and replaced the little weapon with great quickness and nicety.

"There!" she said, closing the lid of the box; "there's a valuable accomplishment for you."

The two girls then left the room, it being settled that Janet should begin her drawing after breakfast the next day, in John's room, and that Julia should read to her while she was at work.

"I never wished so much that I might stay longer at Bury House," said Julia, as they went downstairs, "although I am always sorry to go away when the time comes. This visit

has made a great difference in my life. I return the richer by two true friends—why, it is a fortune in itself!—and oh, Janet, how I do wish I could ask you to Hunsford; and yet I ought not, for you would be wretched there. You would love my dear uncle, but Lady Rosa would scare you, who never knew anybody more alarming than our old ladies and Mrs. Drummond."

"She was not alarming," said Janet, gently; "she was thoroughly kind and good. I think some people did not understand her."

"Ah," said Julia, pursuing her own thoughts, "there's no misunderstanding Lady Rosa; she makes her meaning clear to the dullest comprehension. But, though you couldn't like my aunt, you will be sure to like my cousin. When Laura comes back to England she means to come and see the old ladies, and I know she will like you, and you will like her, and we shall all have some happy days together."

Julia had hardly uttered these words ere the remembrance of the vicinity of Bury House to Bevis crossed her mind, and suggested a doubt, but she remembered in time to prevent any change of tone, that they knew nothing about Dunstan at Bury House.

"Why do you think Mrs. Thornton will like me?" asked Janet; "she and I must be so totally unlike in every respect. I always fancy her a bright little queen of beauty, and a perfect woman of the world, with the elegant manners and that ready knowledge of everything and everybody which I can only imagine by the help of the few novels I have read. I should seem very ignorant and awkward to Mrs. Thornton."

"Because you cannot talk about balls, and never were in London since you were a baby! At that rate you ought to seem ignorant and awkward beside me, and I don't think your humility carries you so far as that. Do you know, Janet," she went on, "you often make me think of Laura's husband; you are so quiet-minded, and have such thorough-

going ways. Then there is something unworldly in you both, a manner of measuring, and considering, and estimating things quite unlike ordinary people's."

"Have I such ways?" asked Janet, surprised.

"Have you? Indeed you have; and it is not only because you do not know the sort of world we live in, it is because you yourself are of another kind; it would make no difference in you if you did know it. You would never be a woman of the world, and Robert Thornton would never be a man of the world; and I think it is the greatest pity you and he did not meet and make a match of it."

"That is kind to your cousin, at any rate," said Janet, laughing, but a little constrainedly; "and consistent, too, after all you have told me of his devotion to her."

"That's just it. I am sure your notions of love and Robert Thornton's would exactly coincide; and that, if you do fall in love, it will be just such a serious and chronic malady as it is with him."

"Have you taken the complaint so very lightly yourself?"

"Well answered, Janet; but, do you know, I think I have. At all events, there's nothing tragic about either me or John, and we shall be the veriest Darby and Joan in existence. And now Joan must go and finish her letter to Darby. Will you walk to the post-office with me when I am ready?"

Janet assented, and Julia was leaving the room, when she returned to say:

"I wish you would give me a photograph of yourself to send to John."

"I would with pleasure, if I had one; but no likeness has ever been taken of me."

"What a shame!" said Julia, and ran off to finish her letter.

Half-an-hour later Janet and Julia were returning from their walk to the post-office. The fresh breeze that swept the leaves along the paths, and occasionally whirled them

up into the girls' faces, also touched Janet's fair cheeks with more than their usual colour, and brightened her eyes. Julia hated wind, and walked along with her head down to avoid it. As they came round the corner of the road on the lower side of Bury House, two gentlemen on horseback rounded the curve on the upper side, and both saw the female figures approaching the gate. Neither on the road, in the grounds of Bury House, nor in the fields on the opposite side of the road, was any other person than these four individuals, and there was no sound of any vehicle upon the road. Miss Monro was the first to recognise the riders, and she did so with a start, but in silence. The next moment Julia exclaimed :

"Look, Janet ; here comes Sir Wilfrid Esdaile." The riders quickened their pace. The girls were within a stone's throw of the gate on the lower, the gentlemen were within a few hundred yards of it on the upper side, Sir Wilfrid Esdaile keeping on the grassy edge of the road, along which the leaves lay in long drifts, when his horse went down with terrific suddenness, as though the animal had been shot, pitching him over its head against one of the great elm trunks. There was a moment of confusion ; the next, Janet, white as a statue, had bidden Julia run for the gardener, and, while Dunstan knelt beside his friend, was standing with his horse's bridle in her hand. Julia started off the instant Janet spoke, and, beyond his first exclamation of horror, Dunstan did not utter a word for a full minute, which seemed to Janet an age.

"Is he killed ?" she asked at length.

"No," said Dunstan, pausing for an instant in his examination of Esdaile. "He is living, but quite insensible."

She led the horse to the hedge, secured the bridle, and joined Dunstan.

"Help will come in a few moments," she said. "If you lift his head I can hold it."

She seated herself on the ground, and Dunstan laid Esdaile's head in her lap. The face was ashy, the eyes

were shut; he looked awfully like death, but the breath was in him, and there was no external injury to the head. A few yards from them lay Esdaile's horse, fallen forward in a horrid heap. It had made a few struggles, but now was only twitching and uttering a dreadful sound between a moan and a snort. As Janet looked at the poor creature her white face grew whiter still.

"Oh, Captain Dunstan," she said, "look at Katinka. Look at her!"

He looked, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Poor brute," he said; "we must have her shot."

"Is she so hopelessly hurt?"

"Yes. Look at her shoulder—or, rather, don't look. How can she have done it?"

"I know. There's a hole in the road just there, in the grass. There's the heap of stones ready for mending it. It was covered by the drifting leaves."

These few sentences were exchanged between them with the greatest rapidity, while Dunstan, in an agony of fear and impatience, looked up and down the road. It was quite solitary; but in a time incredibly short in reality Julia returned, accompanied by two men carrying a door.

"That's well thought of," said Dunstan. "Lay it down here, and we will get him on it."

"You and one of the men can do that; let the other take your horse and go to Dr. Andrews."

It was Janet who spoke, while the men, with mutterings of pity, were lifting the unconscious form.

"Do you go, Duncan," she added, addressing the gardener. "Tell him what has happened, that he may know what to bring." And now, being freed, she rose from the ground.

The man mounted and rode away, and the others lifted their burden.

"Go on, Julia, and tell them at the house. He had better be taken to the end room."

Again Julia obeyed her instantly, and presently the un-

conscious burden was carried up to Bury House, Janet walking at the side, and steadying the still figure with her strong hand.

The old ladies, dreadfully distressed, but quiet, were in the hall, and Julia had gone on to the end room—Janet's sitting-room—and made such preparation as was possible, with the assistance of a couple of frightened maids. They carried Sir Wilfrid in, and laid him on a couch, and then, almost in silence, they endeavoured to restore him to consciousness. Dunstan spoke only to ask:

"Is the doctor's house far off?"

Miss Sandilands answered him that it was a mile from Bury House.

"God send he may be in," said Dunstan. "I don't know what to do. He looks a little better; don't you think so?"

They could say nothing: consternation was in every face.

Except Janet's. She was not there. When the unconscious figure had been laid upon the couch she left the room unnoticed, and ran upstairs to the room which she and Julia had visited that day Presently she reappeared among the group in the end room, and, touching Julia on the arm, signed to her to come out into the hall. On a table lay the old mahogany pistol-case. Janet raised the lid, and bade Julia charge the little weapon.

"I would have done it myself," she said, "if I had been sure enough about it—if I had seen accurately enough how you did it. Be quick, Julia; be quick."

"What do you want it for?"

"The mare must be shot. There, is it done?"

"Poor thing. What a pity! I suppose Captain Dunstan will get Duncan to do it when he comes back." She had charged the pistol as she spoke, and Janet took it from her hand.

"Go back now," she said. "I will come presently."

"How dreadfully white you look, Janet! Oh, how I wish the doctor had come! What—what will he say?"

"God knows. But go—go and help."

Julia left her. The moment the door of the end room closed upon her, Janet went swiftly out of the house, down the avenue, and to the scene of the accident. The road was not quite solitary now; a country-cart, with a woman in it, was drawn up on the opposite side, and a loutish boy had got out of the vehicle, and was inspecting the injured horse, at a safe distance, with a grin upon his countenance. Still quivering, still producing the painful sound between a moan and a snort, and stretching her neck upwards from the ground with the movement that is always so distressing to witness, Katinka lay, a piteous spectacle. Swiftly and steadily Janet approached her, and bidding the grinning lout begone, in a tone that caused him to clamber into the cart on the instant, she went up to the mare's restless, craning neck; and having laid her left hand gently on the heaving nostrils, with a last caress, placed the pistol well within the sharp, sleek, black ear, and fired. A noise, a flash, a shout from the lout in the cart, a strong quiver through the great black heap upon the ground, then stillness; and Janet ran like a wild creature, until she was hidden on the other side of the hedge, when she threw herself upon the grass, and burst into tears.

Before the doctor arrived Esdaile had recovered consciousness, and had spoken, complaining of his shoulder and side. Dr. Andrews found that a broken rib, fracture of the collar-bone, and severe bruises about the head, made up the sum of his injuries. The women waited in great suspense until Captain Dunstan brought the doctor's report to them.

"Happily," he said, in conclusion, "there is no dangerous symptom. He has borne the examination and all the rest well; but it will be impossible to move him for some time. It is very distressing that such a charge should be imposed on you, Miss Sandilands, but it is inevitable."

"It is a charge which we accept with more than willingness," said Miss Susan, in a trembling voice, but with most

kindly dignity, "and count it a privilege. Sir Wilfrid shall have all the care that we can give him."

Dunstan acknowledged their kindness warmly, and, indeed, unfortunate as the occurrence was, it introduced him to the old ladies and to Julia in a very favourable light. Julia, who regarded him with curiosity and interest arising from sources of which all the others were ignorant, found no difficulty in perceiving why Laura had cared for this handsome, refined, vivacious young man, but much in comprehending how she had been bullied into giving him up.

"I must get back at once," continued Dunstan, "and bring over Esdaile's servant. He is a clever fellow, and has travelled with him; fortunately he came down to Bevis with the horses yesterday; he will be his best nurse for to-night, Dr. Andrews says. To-morrow we can have a nurse from London. And now I must be off at once, for it will take some time to get Saunders here, and Dr. Andrews has promised to remain in the house. It is dusk already."

He was hurrying away, but with a sudden remembrance he returned a few steps, and addressed Janet.

"Esdaile rode the black mare Katinka to-day, Miss Monro," he said, "because he thought you would like to see her, they told us she was a favourite with you. This makes me doubly sorry for the accident, and will make him doubly sorry when he learns her fate. I shall be obliged to ask the man who went for the doctor to put the poor brute out of pain. He is the gardener, I think; he will have a gun."

Janet answered him, with quivering lips:

"There is no need. You said Katinka was hopelessly hurt, and she has been shot."

"Has been shot! When? By whom?"

"An hour ago. By me. There was no one else to do it, or to remember her. Pray forgive me, Captain Dunstan; I was very fond of her, and I could not bear her pain."

"You did right, most right," said Dunstan, very

courteously; "I am only sorry you should have had so distressing a task; but I forgot all about the mare until just now."

Duncan was walking Dunstan's horse about the avenue; and Dunstan did not mount at once, but went to the spot where the dead mare lay, when he paused for a moment, while Duncan led the other horse past the unsightly spectacle.

"Get a cart and have it taken away at once," said Dunstan, when he was in the saddle, and then he rode away at a rapid pace, full of distress and anxiety about his friend, but thinking more distinctly of Janet Mouro; the cool promptitude of her action when the accident occurred; the strange strength which made her shoot the mare; the keen suffering in her white, beautiful face.

"It was an extraordinary meeting," he thought, "and effectually did away with any formalities. How promptly she caught the bridle when I jumped off! I had no idea she was so handsome."

CHAPTER XIX.

QUIET DAYS.

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile was not a difficult patient, nor was his case a complicated one. With time, quiet, and good nursing, he would do well, Dr. Andrews had said, and the event justified his opinion. Bury House was, of course, transformed by the entirely novel circumstances, but the old ladies felt, with the customary concurrence of each in the sentiments of the other, that, as such a calamity had been fated to take place, it was a singular softening of it that it should have so happened as to enable them to place all their resources at Sir Wilfrid's disposal, and to afford him proof of the friendship with which they regarded him. As their patient began to mend, the Misses Sandilands began rather to enjoy the state of affairs in the house; and

when he reached the stage at which suggestions for little meals, and admirably-prepared surprises for the very promising appetite of the convalescent, were admissible, they devoted themselves, with surprising constancy and discrimination, to the consideration of all things which might possibly be eaten or drunk under the circumstances. There had never been anything like it known at Bury House since John fell off the topmost branch of an apple-tree in the orchard, into which he had climbed with felonious purposes, and broke his arm, one memorable holiday-time many years before. John, too, had been carried into the "end room," then the school-room, and the old ladies found a serene satisfaction in the general resemblance between the present situation and that interesting event.

It must be admitted that Sir Wilfrid Esdaile was not ill-off for a gentleman with a couple of broken bones, and a head more contused outside and confused inside than was pleasant. He was the object of devoted and intelligent care, and, when convalescence came to him, it came with companionship in which he found a charm, increasing day by day Dunstan was much more impatient of Esdaile's illness than was Esdaile himself; and when he lamented the waste of time—there being lots to do, and everything being made very pleasant for the new owner of Bevis—his friend exhibited a good deal of unexpected fortitude and philosophy. He should be all right, he would say, in time for the hunting; and, as for Dunstan's refusing invitations to shoot at other places in the county because he must get over to see him at least every other day, Sir Wilfrid would not listen to it; he would only be made uncomfortable by anything of the kind. During the first few days after Esdaile's accident Dunstan had been constantly at Bury House; he would ride over from Bevis in the morning, and remain until evening; and he, too, made a most favourable impression on the Misses Sandilands.

"I am sure," said Miss Susan to Janet Monro, after

Captain Dunstan had left the house on the third day, "I am sure we are particularly fortunate in our acquaintances among young men; they have such an ill name nowadays, I am told, for every sort of bad conduct and bad manners. It may be so, and, if it is, I'm very sorry for it, especially as they must all have mothers, or aunts, or sisters; at all events, some women to care about them, and be made miserable accordingly; but, as for those *we* care about, I can only say I don't believe there are three finer or better young men anywhere. You are not acquainted with our John, my dear Janet, and more's the pity; only that it will be a great pleasure for you both when you and he meet. But could any two young men in the world be more what they ought to be than Sir Wilfrid Esdaile and Captain Dunstan are? I am quite agreeably surprised to find Captain Dunstan so very nice, which shows how very wrong it is to form a rash judgment of any one; for I had quite another idea of him."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed. You see, my dear Janet, when one comes to my age, and has known so much of the world, and seen such varieties of character as one must see, I assure you, in many years of school-keeping, it is wonderful how quick one is at observing indications; and in the case of Captain Dunstan I observed two. One was that Sir Wilfrid Esdaile had very little to say about his friend; and as he, in a manner, belongs to the neighbourhood, it would have been only natural for Sir Wilfrid to have said a good deal; the other was that you had nothing at all to say about him."

Miss Susan paused; but, as Janet made no remark, she resumed the even flow of her speech:

"The odd circumstances about Bevis may have given us a little prejudice; but the fact is, we did think Captain Dunstan might not be an estimable person, and that therefore you, out of very proper regard for poor Mrs. Drummond, did not speak of him."

"I am very sorry to have given you such an impression," said Janet hastily, "and very glad that Captain Dunstan has removed it."

"He has indeed," said Miss Susan, with almost solemn emphasis. "He is an exemplary young man; and it is much to be regretted that poor Mrs. Drummond had not the comfort of his society at Bevis. Just look at his devoted attention to Sir Wilfrid, and his nice respectful ways with us."

The impression made upon Julia Carmichael by Captain Dunstan was not altogether so favourable; but the cause of this difference may have been that she regarded him not only as himself, but also as, in some sort, the rival of Robert Thornton. Doubtless she would not have put it in those words to herself, for, after all, Robert Thornton had won her beautiful cousin, while Edward Dunstan had lost her; but, when Dunstan was in her presence, Julia was constantly comparing the two, and always to the advantage of Laura's husband. The easy grace, the slightly sentimental air, the slim form and refined features of Edward Dunstan were not without attraction for Julia; but she would not admit that even in looks the man whom her cousin had loved was the superior of the man whom she had married. Quiet manliness, as of one to whom fear and weakness were unknown, and genuine goodness, set their mark upon Robert Thornton's face, and beautified it in Julia's eyes; besides, she had watched the brightening and the softening of that face when it addressed itself to Laura; she had seen in it the expression of love such as she believed it to be the supreme blessing and highest privilege of a woman to win.

Julia had done her share of the good offices which the patient needed with goodwill and cleverness; and the bonds of friendship between herself and her lover's friend were drawn closer. Julia came to understand Sir Wilfrid Esdaile very thoroughly during that time at Bury House, and with her strong regard there mingled, after a while, a great deal of pity. Why? Sir Wilfrid Esdaile's lot was surely a bright

one, as brightness is allotted in this world, even though he had just at present a couple of bones undergoing repair, and was excluded from the customary autumnal pursuits of the British patrician. Day by day the liking between these two grew, while Dunstan never became more interesting to Julia, or more intimate with her, than during the first few hours, when strangeness was overthrown by the emergencies of the circumstances; and with that liking, the feeling of pity, which had also been of swift growth in her heart, increased.

The order of the days—chill now, and shortening towards the long evenings of the doleful English winter—when Sir Wilfrid had recovered sufficiently to admit of their being ordered, was as follows: In the mornings Dunstan came, or the invalid had some other visitor from without; after luncheon the two girls sat with him, Julia sometimes reading aloud, while Janet drew, and Sir Wilfrid lay on a couch in the window fronting the twin elms, which were daily growing bare and gaunt. Janet had drawn the group of ragged trees with the Rookery in their topmost branches with great fidelity, and from John's room, where she had encamped for the present; and, Sir Wilfrid having admired the production with gratifying zeal, she was now engaged in copying it for him. Those were pleasant hours; the patient was suffering no longer, and each of them marked a step towards health—hours which the three who shared them were destined, for far different reasons, never to forget, although there is little to tell of the manner of their falling like drops into the ocean of time.

"Janet would not be a bad subject for a picture herself, as she sits at her drawing-board," wrote Julia to John Sandilands, in the joyful letter which was to tell him that Sir Wilfrid was almost all right again. "The quiet intentness of her expression, and the steady grace of her attitude, are very striking. If she could take her own likeness, I think I know some one who would give a great price for it; but she does not know anything about that. How

much you would admire her; although, as she is absolutely unlike me, I am bound to believe you would not fall in love with her; how much her perfect unworldliness would please you! And, combined with that, her readiness and usefulness are so remarkable. She took command of us all, when Sir Wilfrid was hurt, on the instant, and everything went right; no one would ever think of questioning her judgment in things practical, but all her ideas and motives are quite different from the ideas and motives one is used to. Janet never sees a half-way in anything: you would have to know her, to be present at our talks here, and to see her when Sir Wilfrid and I discuss the people, and places, and the world's ways with which he and I are familiar, and of which she knows nothing at all, to hear her questions and her remarks. Everything according to Janet must be either right or wrong, true or false, lofty or low; no expediency, no compromise, no deference to public opinion has any chance of her approval, or indeed of her comprehension. Sir Wilfrid and I steal many amused, and, it must be confessed, guilty looks at each other, when she, bending over her drawing, with intent eyes, and her fair cheek just tinged with the slightest colour, which only comes when she grows earnest, gives utterance to some sentiment or opinion which would produce a small revolution in society, as if nothing could possibly be more self-evident, and the guidance of life according to such sentiments and opinions were not for a moment to be questioned. You are not to suppose that she is dogmatic, or combative, or self-righteous, or aggressive, or in any way unamiable; I never knew a sweeter human being; but she is more all-of-a-piece than anybody else, and I don't think, with all her cleverness, Janet ever could be made into a woman of the world, even of the best kind, the wise and well-conducted kind, whom, goodness knows, the world wants badly. She is, for instance, tremendously puzzled by my conduct, and the people at Hunsford. She does not like to condemn me, but she thinks it wrong that I have

not told my uncle and Lady Rosa about our engagement; I cannot make her understand the position, because she could not realise the weakness of my uncle's character, the strength of her ladyship's temper, and the expediency of making things comfortable for the Colonel so long as I can do so. I can see that she gives it up, puts the matter into the background of her mind, and I have to leave it so.

"In her way she is enthusiastic, full of zeal for human rights, and the great causes which I do not now understand, and could never get myself up to caring for. Of course I am very sorry for the poor, and I should like to have a great deal more money to give away than I have got, and I hope, wherever I might be, I should try to be kind to people; but Janet's are entirely different notions: she speaks of the poor as part-owners of all that is possessed by the rich, and excludes any idea either of goodness or choice on the part of the latter, in dealing with them. You should have seen Sir Wilfrid's look at me when she spoke of the tithe of all we possess being the 'inheritance' of the poor, and you should have seen her look at him as she raised her eyes on his observation that the poor were mostly kept out of their 'inheritance,' and said—'No precept is plainer in the law whereby we must all be judged. Do people in the world think then that they have a right to take and to leave among those precepts?' It is a pity Sir Wilfrid Esdaile is not a landed proprietor; if he were, I fancy the poor in his neighbourhood would profit by his temporary imprisonment at Bury House. Janet has seen little, nothing indeed, of the world, but she has read a great deal, and she is eagerly interested in places and people of the most outlandish kind. I was rather maliciously amused, remembering how little of plantation life you had induced Sir Wilfrid to examine, to observe his ingenious devices to wriggle out of the subject in conversation with Janet. He was ready enough to tell, and she and I were both delighted to hear, about the scenery of Ceylon, about the forests, the flowers, the animals, and

the precious stones (she admires my ring excessively); but she wanted to know all about the native population, and embarrassed him frightfully by assuming that he was familiar with the Coolie labour question; because it must be the duty of all holders of property to understand every matter in which those whom they employ are concerned! It was fine to hear Sir Wilfrid excusing his own ignorance on the score of your knowledge; it is frequently fine (and you may be sure I appreciate it) to hear him refer to you as an emporium of wisdom, and a faultless standard of behaviour. If one could only be both learned and virtuous by proxy, this might do, but, as Janet would be the last person in the world to accept either the whipping-boy or his converse, she listens gravely, but unconvinced, and in a very sweet, simple manner, by her single-mindedness and her extraordinary thoroughness, she is inspiring Sir Wilfrid with a loftier, but also more troublesome, ideal of his place and meaning in the world than he has previously had. Whether it will last is another matter; under certain circumstances, I should say it would, but—however, not even to you have I right to say what is in my mind just now. The time may soon come when I shall have that right.

"Captain Dunstan is here constantly; and the more I see of him the more I am convinced that there never was a more perverse turn of fate than that which hindered Laura's marriage with him. Never were two people 'so justly formed to meet by nature' as they: unless indeed it might be Robert Thornton and Janet Monro. Captain Dunstan and I do not get on very well together; I suppose he does not like me because I am Laura's cousin, and suspects, though I have never given him the faintest indication that such is the case, that I am acquainted with circumstances hurtful to his self-love; and I suppose I don't like him because he is so very different from the man I love, and also from the two men whom I like best, Laura's

husband and Sir Wilfrid Esdaile. I must say, dearest John, I look upon the good luck which gave me to you as the exception which proves the rule that the right people do not meet in this world. Captain Dunstan is extremely polite to me, but he never has anything to say if I happen to be alone when he comes in, and he looked unmistakably pleased when he heard that I am to leave Bury House on next Saturday. He will be easier in his mind, he thinks, when the constant reminder is out of his sight; but it will make no real difference.

"When I said there never were two people so much alike as Laura and Captain Dunstan, I ought to have excepted one very material point—constancy of feeling. I believe he is as much in love with her as ever he was, and that he is often unable to care about his new possessions because Laura is not one of them; and I am equally sure that Laura—also in the midst of novelty, and however she may have felt at the time when she threw him over—never troubles her pretty head about him now. She writes in capital spirits, is not tired yet of the yacht, and says, if she should become tired of it, her husband will winter at Naples, or Rome, or anywhere she likes. These people—Laura and Captain Dunstan and their kind, I mean—amuse me with their careful provision against ennui. What a good thing it is that neither of us is disposed to that mood, and that we shall never be rich or idle enough to take it by contagion.

"I have formed another young-lady friendship. The object is Miss Ainslie, the daughter of an Indian civilian whom you have heard of, Sir Wilfrid tells me, at Ceylon. Her father knew my uncle very well, in India, years ago, and she has been here several times, with Mrs. Cathcart, since Sir Wilfrid's accident. She is an odd girl, but I like her very much; and if Captain Dunstan would but console himself with her, it would be a pleasant arrangement for the neighbourhood, which, it is quite plain, will not long

endure bachelorhood at Bevis with equanimity. I am like Miss Austen's Emma, only that I don't want to have any active part in the match-making that occupies my thoughts I am not sure, indeed, that I could refrain if I got the chance in one instance ; but that is the topic which I have forsworn for the present."

The quiet days, which were to be so memorable, were drawing to a close. The readings, the talks, the evenings when Janet played the music that she loved and understood, and that one at least of the others was learning from her to love and understand, would soon be over. Dunstan was full of anticipation of Sir Wilfrid's return to Bevis ; and of the pleasant doings that were to ensue. He had not carried out his intention of making any formal explanation or apology to Miss Monro, in the matter of his seeming neglect of her ; the circumstances of their meeting had superseded all that. It was not until many days had elapsed after Sir Wilfrid's accident, and when Dunstan's had become quite a familiar presence at Bury House, that he asked Miss Monro whether she could explain the meaning of the message with which she had entrusted Mrs. Manners.

"The parcel was sealed with Mrs. Drummond's seal," said Dunstan, "and it contained nothing but a small key. Can you tell me anything about it?"

"I cannot," was the disappointing reply of Miss Monro. "The little packet was found by me in the writing-desk which Mrs. Drummond always used, and which was among the articles she gave me. I use it now. There was a slip of paper wrapped round the packet with my name upon it, the enclosure was addressed, as you saw, to you."

"This is the key," said Dunstan, putting it into Janet's hands, "can you tell me to what it belongs? I have tried several drawers and boxes, but it fits none of them ; and, indeed, there are keys for all the things of the kind in the house."

Janet examined the key and returned it to him.

"No," she said. "I have never seen that key, and I do not know anything which it would be likely to fit."

"Miss Monro," said Dunstan, hesitatingly, "I am sure you were sufficiently in Mrs. Drummond's confidence to know that I was not in her confidence at all. It distresses me very much to feel that there must have been something in her mind which she wished me to know, that there is some wish or intention of hers unfulfilled. That it is so is evident from this." He put back the key into his waistcoat pocket. "I shall endeavour in every possible way to discover what that wish or intention was, and to the best of my ability it shall be carried it. Will you help me, Miss Monro? Will you ransack your memory, look over papers, and in every way try to enable me to do the only thing I can to honour the memory of Mrs. Drummond?"

Janet did not answer immediately, and he repeated:

"Will you promise me this, Miss Monro, for the sake of your old friend?"

Then she said, slowly, and with downcast eyes:

"I will."

CHAPTER XX.

AMABEL'S FOLLY.

THE Chantry was one of those places which seem to have been named on the principle that applies appellations of garden and grove in crowded parts of London, to dreary regions where no flower ever bloomed, and stony-hearted spaces where no tree ever cast the shadow of flickering leaves on the dull, gray flags. There was not even a tradition to justify the name; no fragment of an ancient arch, or mutilated bit of carving from a long o'ergrown and hidden cloister, connected the place with the mediæval fame of the great Abbey whose ruins were the boast of the county. It lay quite apart from all the historic associations of the neighbourhood, and was denounced by Miss Ainslie as all

the more desperately uninteresting because the name led one to expect something.

To unimaginative minds, with a taste for the solid and the comfortable, The Chantry might, nevertheless, have seemed a satisfactory residence, and it certainly did credit to the agent who had been employed by Mr. Ainslie to carry out in substantial reality the vision of his expatriated years. The house was a solid square stone edifice, with good-sized rooms, well-shaped and well-lighted, and the grounds, though small in extent, and perfectly flat, were prettily planted. Mr. Ainslie's hobby, the farm, would have begun at the hall-door, if he had had his way; as he had not, the ornamental portion of the place was of sufficient extent to prevent the useful portion from being obtrusive. A well-kept road at the back of the shrubberies amid which the house stood, divided them from the farm; so that, as Miss Ainslie consoled herself by remembering, her papa's pets were neither seen, heard, nor smelt on the home premises. The prevailing characteristic of The Chantry was trimness; it was a place which, if it had been situated anywhere in the vicinity of London, especially if it had been near the Thames, would have inevitably been described as a "box." Its provinciality saved it, however, from that indignity The interior of the house accorded with its exterior physiognomy; it was comfortable and commonplace; and the war declared by Miss Ainslie against the furniture (the whole had been purchased from the former proprietors) was unprovoked, except as a matter of taste. What was the good, Miss Ainslie contended, of talking about things being very substantial, "and very dear," like Toots's tailor, if they were simply detestable, and too vulgar for endurance? The more substantial the things were, the longer they would last; and the dearer they were, the more shame for the stupid man who had taken them "at a valuation;" just as though, so long as there were tables and chairs, curtains and carpets enough in the house, it

did not matter in the least about the shapes of the former or the colours of the latter! She professed herself disgusted from the beginning, but the superfluous energy which was a standing cause of wonder and regret to her mother, found a vent in the extensive reforms that she considered necessary; she rather enjoyed the making of "ructions," as her Irish groom described the young lady's proceedings.

Mr. Ainslie was better satisfied with The Chantry. The novelty of his leisure had not yet worn off; and though he was, as Amabel said, always wanting somebody to talk India to, he derived a fair proportion of the pleasure he had anticipated from his farm and his pigs. The dry, chippy, brown, dejected little man was better content with his lot than are most human beings, especially when they have had any power of choice given them; and even the vivacity and restlessness of his pretty daughter troubled him little. He complained of it, but she was right enough when she said that he liked it on the whole.

Amabel Ainslie had been sent home from India unusually early, and she had not seen her parents in the interval between her being sent "home" and her being sent "out." She knew a little of them, there was something to be learned from their letters, but they knew nothing of her, there was nothing to be learned from hers; and, if Mrs. Ainslie had been obliged to describe her feelings after Amabel's return to Bombay, she could have done so most truthfully by saying that she felt as though a strange young lady had come on a visit of undefined duration. It is a feature of these modern days that mother and daughters, father and sons, brothers and sisters, dwellers together, with those natural ties to unite them which in old-fashioned times had a matter-of-course significance, do not "understand" each other. The fault is chiefly with the young ones; they like to be, or to believe themselves, *incompris;* a state of things as much affected by the bouncing belle as

by the young lady of a more poetic order. Amabel was touched by this foolish affectation, and in danger of being spoilt by it. Mrs. Ainslie, who had never possessed much strength of character, took advantage of her invalidism to leave the little she had in abeyance, and "gave up Amabel," as she told Mr. Ainslie, when her daughter's high spirits and wilfulness became oppressive to her. On the other hand, Amabel would complain to her father, and to Mrs. Cathcart—who was a little shocked at first, but afterwards came to "understand" the girl better—that she "could not manage mamma."

The latter task was not so easy as it might have appeared. Mrs. Ainslie had a good deal of quiet obstinacy in her disposition, and she had by degrees sunk into a state of indifference to most things except her own comforts, for which a long residence in India, with few associates of her own race and class, combined with confirmed ill-health, offered at least reasonable excuse. In truth, Amabel Ainslie had but little guidance in her life, and was more affected by the peculiarities of her parents than aided by their judgment or controlled by their authority She had felt some misgivings about her unknown cousin, Mrs. Cathcart, on whom she knew she must depend for a good deal of such pleasantness as she might hope for in her life at The Chantry; her father's notions about his niece had been of the vaguest kind, and Mrs. Cathcart had not taken the trouble of making acquaintance with Amabel in her long spell of boarding-school life. These misgivings gave way rapidly before the kindness of Mrs. Cathcart, and Amabel herself had inspired the Vicar's wife with sincere affection. Also with anxiety. There are lives so hedged about with the defences of a common-place and even prosperity, so featureless and smooth, that one wonders how change, trouble, calamity of any kind is to get at them, to transform them out of likeness to their former selves. Such a life was Amabel Ainslie's. If it were ever to be knocked

out of its fair proportions and simple dignities, decencies and delights, "the bolt" would have to come "from the blue." Mrs. Cathcart was not a fanciful person; it was something in the girl herself that made her anxious; an easily produced depression, and, under her high spirits, a dash of superstition that vexed her cousin most. It matched so ill with her rather daring independence and her active practical ways; and then it was so foolish! Mrs. Cathcart hated the mere notion that Amabel might gain a character for "oddness," and she had been thinking about it, just before Mr. Cathcart set out to pay his first visit to Bevis, on that day when Amabel had come over from The Chantry to see her, unexpectedly

"I do believe she is a fatalist," Mrs. Cathcart said to her husband, who was not prepared either to dispute her view, or to deal with the case from a pastoral standpoint; "she says the oddest things about people, and she declares that she has always been right in what she calls her fortune-telling."

"Don't let her prophesy about yourself, my dear," said the Vicar, with a smile of easy superiority over every kind of weakness of the imagination; "for I am by no means sure that you would not be silly enough to be haunted by the nonsense she might talk. I suppose it is a lot of rubbish she picked up in India."

Mrs. Cathcart wisely said no more; her pretty cousin would not be likely to get much countenance or help from the Vicar. But a day or two later her mind turned in a direction which it had been apt to take when assailed by perplexities, not, indeed, of this kind, but concerning what she called her "clergywoman's affairs."

"What a friend to her Janet would be!" so ran Mrs. Cathcart's meditations. "I cannot imagine any better fortune for her, except, indeed, a husband in all respects suitable, than Janet for a friend. I have never yet tried to make up a young-lady friendship, and I should think it is

rather more difficult than making up a match. Oh, my dear Janet, how I do wish you had not gone away from Bevis!"

The latter sentence was one into which Mrs. Cathcart's thoughts frequently shaped themselves. In the present instance she was reminded, by seeing Captain Dunstan pass the window of the library, that wishing Miss Monro had never gone away from Bevis was tantamount to wishing he had never come thither. Presently he was announced, and Mrs. Cathcart learned from him all that had occurred on the previous day at Bury House.

She was sorry for Sir Wilfrid, who had impressed her favourably on the occasion of his only visit to the Vicarage. He could not, indeed, compete with his friend in either person or manner, to Mrs. Cathcart's mind. Captain Dunstan was so very good-looking, so singularly interesting —she did not think Amabel's account of him had done him anything like justice; while Sir Wilfrid was not remarkably handsome, or remarkably interesting; he was merely very "nice," according to that handy generalisation of which women make so much use—applying it impartially to Niagara, or St. Peter's, or to somebody's baby or behaviour. Was there anything she could do, any way in which she could help? Then she found that Dunstan had come to talk to her not only of Sir Wilfrid, but of Miss Monro, and she threw into her manner just the least tinge of coldness. Mrs. Cathcart was decidedly of opinion that Captain Dunstan had behaved with great negligence towards Miss Monro.

The tinge of coldness speedily disappeared, however, when Captain Dunstan spoke of Janet's helpfulness, and calmness, in the midst of the distress and confusion Sir Wilfrid's accident had caused—with admiration which she herself could hardly have surpassed had she been dealing with the pleasant theme of Janet's praise.

"It will be a good while before he can be brought back to Bevis," said Dunstan, in conclusion; "I shall see him

every day, and when he begins to get well, I dare say he won't find it dull with Miss Carmichael and Miss Monro."

Mrs. Cathcart had never heard of Miss Carmichael, but she was quite sure there could be no dulness where the society of Miss Monro might be obtained. And then she said that she meant to see Janet very soon. Dunstan cut a visit which he felt had taken a satisfactory turn, rather short, as he was anxious to get back to Bury House, and he had hardly left Mrs. Cathcart when Amabel arrived, "rattling" her ponies along in the manner which Sir Wilfrid had objected to.

Mrs. Cathcart told her the news, and, to her great astonishment, Amabel turned extremely pale, and sat down helplessly on hearing it.

"Never mind me," she said, in reply to Mrs. Cathcart's look of surprise, "I am only a greater fool than usual!"

"What in the world do you mean?"

"Just what I say; that I am only a greater fool than usual—according to your notions, I mean. I saw Sir Wilfrid Esdaile yesterday for the first time, and I am sincerely glad to hear to-day what has happened to him! Don't be angry with me, if you can possibly help it, and pray, pray don't tell the Vicar—but I saw it—I really did—I solemnly assure you I did—in his face!"

"Saw what in his face, Amabel? That he was to be thrown from his horse and break a rib and his collar-bone? How can you be so absurd?"

"No, no, not quite that. But that there was misfortune before him; and now it has come, or rather he has come up with it upon the road, and it is only this—only a broken bone or two, a little illness—nothing!"

She spoke quite excitedly, and Mrs. Cathcart could only look the vexation she felt.

"I know you never will believe me," Amabel went on; "but I can't help it, something that puts these things into my head. I do know the lucky look, like Captain Dunstan's,

for all his melancholy eyes and fine smile, and the doomed look, it was this I saw in Sir Wilfrid Esdaile's face."

"And now he has—what is it you witch people call it?—dree'd his weird, I suppose," said Mrs. Cathcart, smiling, "and there's nothing more for him to fear from Fate."

"I will tell you that when I see him again," replied Amabel, seriously. "It is very odd that I have felt Sir Wilfrid Esdaile wasn't lucky, ever since I first heard his name mentioned. Captain Dunstan said I made a bad shot there, but you see I did not."

"Really, Amabel, you are excessively provoking. Any one would think you were a prophet, and pleased with the result of your predictions. Pray don't be sibylline any more, but come and look at what Sir Wilfrid Esdaile brought for you from Ceylon. Captain Dunstan asked me to take charge of the box, as he will be unable to go to The Chantry for some time."

Amabel pounced on the box with the eagerness of a child, and was speedily absorbed in tortoiseshell and coral to the oblivion of everything else.

Mrs. Cathcart did not relinquish, though she was obliged to defer, her intention of bringing about a friendship between Amabel Ainslie and Janet Monro, and accordingly she took her pretty young cousin with her to Bury House so soon as she was informed that visitors were admitted.

They found Captain Dunstan at Bury House; he was, in fact, walking under the almost bare branches of the elm-trees with Miss Monro. The ladies left their carriage at the gate; Dunstan pointed out to them the scene of the accident, and then Amabel walked on with him towards the house, leaving Mrs. Cathcart to follow with Janet, and "talk parish," as Amabel said. In fact, they talked of her.

Sir Wilfrid was getting on so well that there was no reason why the little party gathered together at Bury House on that afternoon should not be a cheerful one. The old ladies were charmed with their visitors. Mrs. Cathcart

regretted that she had not made their acquaintance sooner; and Amabel thought how easy it would be to manage her mamma if she were like those dear old ladies, especially if she were like Miss Susan, and wondered whether Miss Carmichael's lover who was in Ceylon was "nice." Miss Carmichael herself did not interest Amabel very vividly although she did study her with what she called her "seeing intention," and set her down as one of the lucky Miss Carmichael would be all right, she would marry the Scotchman; he would make the coffee plantation pay, and all would be well. With Mrs. Cathcart's eye upon her, as they sat round a solidly-spread tea-table, Amabel was restrained from some of her fancies, and at the same time invited to try a little more flirtation with Captain Dunstan although it had not succeeded on board ship. So she was very bright and amusing; and Sir Wilfrid, who lay on his couch, and had his tea on a small table, with the daintiest little tea-service of Old Chelsea, and a silver teapot a hundred years old, was very well indeed, all things considered, and privately rather sorry that his condition of privilege was drawing to a close. He too was charmed with Miss Ainslie, and forgave her about the ponies.

But the central object of Amabel's observation was Janet Monro. She looked at her when she moved, and listened to her when she spoke, with all the admiration which Mrs. Cathcart could have wished her to feel. She said to herself many times that she had never seen any one like her, so gravely graceful, so simply gracious; but she felt at the same time an unaccountable dread of her. Was this one of her superstitions, she wondered, and would it go away, and leave her mind clear towards the sweet and lovely young woman of whom Mrs. Cathcart had not said nearly enough. What was this horrid sort of power that she had of foreknowing, though only in the vaguest instinctive way, when harm was coming to her? It was not fancy; she had felt it as a little child: towards a nursemaid at first sight, and the woman

had ill-treated her; towards a dog, and he had long afterwards bitten her; towards a schoolfellow in her school-days, and she had done her an unprovoked wrong. But the strange instinctive dread had never come to her so strongly as it came while she sat opposite to Janet Monro at the Misses Sandilands' tea-table, in the bright ordinary-looking room, most unlikely scene for superstitious promptings or indications.

"What harm can she do me, or I her?" Amabel asked herself, almost in the moment of the impression that stole over her. "For this time the feeling is two-sided, and I am afraid of myself as well as of her. Sweet, lovely, benignant creature! it is wicked to let any such thought into my mind, and I will not. Mrs. Cathcart is right, this is mere superstition, and I will conquer it."

"And now, tell me, what do you think of Janet Monro?" Mrs. Cathcart asked Amabel, when they were on their way home.

"I think she is quite lovely, and absolutely unlike any one I have ever seen. I think she is too good and too lofty to be the friend of a—what shall I say?—a mere bubble and bauble of a creature like me—and also too good and too lofty to be——"

Here Amabel paused in her speech and touched up the ponies.

"To be—yes?"

"Never mind, I was going to be impertinent, but I won't. How she walks! How she talks! And how strange her life has been! Did you notice how interested she was about India?—stupid, wretched place!—she has dressed it up in all the glories of the 'Arabian Nights.' To think that I have been to the other side of the world and back, and that Janet Monro has never seen a play or heard an opera in her life, and yet I'm sure there's nothing she could not do. Oh dear!" And she turned a comical face to her companion. "How nice it would be to have her to talk to papa about farming and 'cutcherry,' and to manage mamma."

"I see you appreciate her; but why should you think you could not make a friend of her, Amabel?"

"Because she 'couldna be fashed' with me, as the awful example in the Scotch story-book says."

"You are quite wrong, and, as usual, perverse."

"Very well, we shall see."

Miss Ainslie's ponies soon became well acquainted with the road to Bury House; for this first visit was succeeded by many more, and Mrs. Cathcart had no need to make any effort to bring her friend and her cousin together. A more promising young-lady friendship could not have been desired than that which formed itself between the two, who were so very different. On Amabel's part it was deeply enthusiastic, so generous that it extended to all Janet's objects of predilection—the rooks, the fowls, the flowers, the unamiable Spitz, the gardener's children, the kitten, and Julia Carmichael—and so disinterested that it had no jealousy in it. She knew her place in Janet's heart, and she was satisfied with it. Never had Amabel Ainslie known such happy days as those during which Sir Wilfrid Esdaile was rapidly getting well at Bury House; and she was constantly coming and going from thence to The Chantry, whither she carried glowing accounts of Janet. Mr. Ainslie made several visits to the old and young ladies, and to Sir Wilfrid, and duly carried polite messages from Mrs. Ainslie, who was unequal to the fatigue of visiting.

Thus the time passed, and the end of this pleasant and harmless season was drawing near. Amabel was in high spirits at her own prospects, for Janet was to go on a visit to The Chantry after a little while, when Julia should have returned to Hunsford, and Sir Wilfrid to Bevis. Amabel had not forgotten her former impression that Captain Dunstan had been defended against her attempts at captivating him by a prior attachment. She saw a good deal of him now, and she became entirely convinced of its truth. But she believed that she had discovered the

object of that attachment; and that, just for once in this world of fragments, failures, and contrarieties, the everything for which she cared just then was going to be all right. Amabel, with all her impulsiveness and unruliness, had a great deal of real delicacy of mind, and she carefully abstained from a question or a hint which might possibly give pain to Janet. Perhaps her perceptions would not have been so keen, or her tact so nice, but for the voiceless teaching of something in her own heart that had never before stirred it. However that may have been, Amabel Ainslie was very happy; her cousin's device for her benefit had succeeded to perfection, and, if it had produced consequences only to be made evident in the future, this was a common occurrence in human affairs.

"And just to think," said Amabel to herself, on the day when Janet promised to go on a visit to The Chantry —"I had that queer shudder when I saw her first, and felt it would either be my fate to harm her, or her fate to harm me! What nonsense! It was the very best day for me I have ever yet seen. All that was my folly, and I am done with it for ever."

CHAPTER XXI.

JULIA'S WHISPER.

THE day came on which Julia was to leave Bury House, and she had the pleasure of seeing that her departure was sincerely regretted. The old ladies were unusually demonstrative, because they were anxious she should not think that Janet in any way filled her place with them. "She is a dear girl, and we are very fond of her," said Miss Sandilands, thinking to dissipate Julia's unusual thoughtfulness, which she innocently ascribed to a feeling which had not troubled Julia for an instant; "but you are our own, you know, being John's, and there can never be any comparison between you."

"Of course I know, dear aunt," said Julia, "and, because I know it, I feel all the more for Janet. How friendless she is, except for you, both of you, I mean; and how dreadful it must be to have no one in the world to whom one is quite and always the first!"

"That is the lot of a great many people, especially women, in this world, my dear; we cannot all have lovers or husbands, nor can those who have be always sure of them. I know what you mean, and there is no more natural or womanly feeling, I think. I should be sorry if you had not the pity that comes of being happy and beloved."

"It is not exactly pity in her case, aunt. Somehow, Janet is a person I should not presume to pity; it is a wonder that it should be so, rather than compassion because it is."

"But all that may change. Janet may find herself the first person in the world to some one, any day. You young people are impatient, and apt to think, because something or other which you would like to happen does not come at once, it will not come at all."

Julia looked anxiously at the fair, smooth, kindly old face of Miss Susan—who for all that she was very innocent was also very wise—and for a moment thought she might mean something more than her words implied. If so, Julia might hint what was in her own mind without any infraction of delicacy towards Janet; but there was no encouragement in the grave, tranquil look that met hers; Miss Susan was merely uttering a truism in the abstract.

"Ah, well," said Julia, "I hope everything good is in store for Janet. How little I thought I should come to like her so much!"

"I am very glad to hear you say that; because, in reality, whatever the future may bring her, Janet has no friends except ourselves—friends, I mean, that she could turn to, if we were gone, and I should like to think that you and John would look after her."

"Of course we should. I have written him volumes about her, and I am sure he is all but in love with her; at least that is the mood of mind I have done my very best to inspire."

"You certainly are not a missish girl, Julia; there is sound generosity in you."

"Especially as I can thoroughly trust John not to take advantage of it. But, seriously, he and I will be all that mere friends can be to her."

"Mere friends!" repeated the old lady, with a smile, "that is a big promise, too, when it is meant as you mean it. Your time is nearly up, dear, and you have to say good-bye to Sir Wilfrid. He will miss you very much."

Janet accompanied Julia to the railway station, and there was not much said between them, for Julia's maid occupied a seat in the carriage.

"And to think," said Julia, when they found themselves alone upon the platform, waiting for the train, "that I cannot ask you to my home! that we may not meet for a whole year—it is really too hard!"

"When we meet, next year, it will be such a happy event," said Janet—disinterested joy in the happiness of another lighting up her face with a radiance such as might touch that of an angel-messenger of good news—"we shall have John with us, and he will have come to take you home. Don't look doubtful, Julia. Sir Wilfrid told me he was quite sure of it; sure on John's own calculation; he repeated it again last night. And the time will pass easily; you will have such constant letters, and you will be such a comfort to Colonel Chumleigh, and Mr. and Mrs. Thornton will probably be in England. You——"

"Ah yes, but I am not thinking altogether and only of myself, Janet. You never seem to consider it possible that any one should be thinking about you, and your share of things that have to be done and borne. It will be dull for you, though the old ladies are so dear and good; and more

so because of what has been." She took her companion's two hands in hers, the time was almost come; the train was grinding slowly into its place alongside the platform. "I wish, I wish you could see as I see, and what I have longed to speak, but never dared till now. Dear Janet, think, think how good and gentle and kind he is, and—pray forgive me—don't go on looking at happiness through others' eyes, when you have but to stretch out your hand, and take it as your own."

"Julia! What do you mean?"

The guard requested the ladies to take their seats; the maid was angrily urgent; not a moment remained. As she kissed Janet rapidly, in farewell, Julia whispered:

"That he has loved you from the first."

The bell rang, the train glided away. Julia looked out so long as she could see it at the graceful figure on the platform, at the fair face, tinged with an exquisite flush, and wearing an expression she had never seen before, a look of startled hope; and when she lost sight of both she sank back into a corner of the carriage, and burst into inexplicable tears.

"He has loved you from the first! He has loved you from the first!" The words were surely written in golden letters upon the air; the wheels of the carriage that took her back to Bury House surely reproduced them to her ears; they were beaten out in the ring of the horses' hoofs upon the road. Julia, who was so clever, so observant, who knew the world so well, had seen this wonder, had longed to tell her, but had not dared. Then it was no guess, no surmise, not an idea of yesterday, for Julia had said "from the first," and her words implied that she had watched, and been satisfied that she was right. Beautiful waves of colour rushed up to the sweet serene face of Janet Monro as she thought these thoughts, all in a bright confusion, and with a breathless joy. No human creature could be more simple-

minded, more exquisitely modest than she, but the frankness of her nature was as characteristic as its simplicity and its modesty; and the quick surprise, the wonder which Julia's whisper had called up, did not lead her to disguise from herself, that a glimpse of heaven had been revealed to her by the last words of her friend, who must evermore be doubly dear because she had spoken those words.

"I wish you could see as I see." This, too, Julia had said. But could Julia—could any one except herself—conceive that the seeing as Julia had seen meant to Janet dazzling light, glory, not only gilding the future with the golden lustre of happiness, but throwing backward gleams upon that past which could never again come to her memory sober-garmented or of darkened aspect? If it had ever crossed her mind that this wonder could come to pass, she would only have rebuked her own wild thoughts with, "Impossible, impossible!" and have striven to forget the illusion in a deeper hiding of her secret in her heart, and a truer humility But it had been whispered to her by another, and the music of hope was in the words which woke tuneful echoes in a heart, pure, brave, and tender beyond most hearts of women.

She had hardly subdued the flutter of her nerves when the carriage drew up at the entrance to Bury House, and the light still rested upon her face, lending it a new, strange beauty, which was immediately perceived by a gentleman who stepped from under the porch and assisted her to alight. This was Captain Dunstan, who had just arrived, and who said to himself as he followed her into the house:

"Miss Monro does not seem much cut up at parting with her friend. How much a touch of colour improves her, I never saw her look so handsome!"

Captain Dunstan had got into the habit of noticing Miss Monro's looks a good deal. The strange, almost startling impression she had made upon him on that

memorable day when she put Katinka out of the pain she could not bear to see, had deepened into curiosity. The idea of her, in the first instance, had not been at all agreeable to him, both because it came accompanied by some inevitable fault-finding with himself—a state of mind which Dunstan would always shirk when he could—and also because he had been bored by the frequent mention of her that he encountered at Bevis and at the Vicarage just when he was in that uncomfortable mood. The circumstances of their meeting and the quickening of his curiosity had relieved him from that sense of boredom which is so fatal to one human being's interest in another; he had found out at once that Miss Monro was odd, he had also seen that she was handsome. Of late, he had taken to reminding himself of her beauty, without the addition that she was not his style.

They went into the drawing-room, which was unoccupied, and in reply to Janet's question whether he had yet seen Sir Wilfrid, Captain Dunstan said he had only just arrived, and had been told that Dr. Andrews was with the patient.

"Who will be quite out of his hands in a day or two," added Dunstan, "and able to come home, but, I suspect, not at all willing. He has been utterly spoilt by the old ladies, and Miss Carmichael, and yourself, and how he will put up with only Mrs. Manners and me, I don't know."

"There will be shooting for the present, and hunting after awhile, and there's always the Vicarage. Then everybody will call, I suppose." She added, gravely, "You will not have people in the house just yet?"

"Certainly not," he answered, eagerly, for he was glad of any opportunity of introducing the one awkward subject as little awkwardly as possible. "Nothing shall be done at Bevis that could be held in the least disrespectful to the memory you cherish. I greatly fear that you must have had a very bad opinion of me. It is my strongest wish to induce you to change it."

Captain Dunstan had a graceful figure, fine melancholy dark eyes, and a persuasive voice; and as he stood deferentially by Janet's side, and spoke and looked pleadingly, all these advantages told. If he had offended her, if she had been prejudiced against him, she could hardly have withstood the charm of his attitude, his gaze, and his tone. But she had no grievance in her mind, and when, with deep blushes, and embarrassment which surprised him by its contrast with her habitual serenity, she assured him that she had never thought otherwise than well of him, he broke through the difficulty that had hitherto daunted him, and told her his neglect of her had troubled him sorely He really had taken himself to task for it, in earnest, if not with any great severity, and a man's self-condemnation is not so unpleasant when the listener is a beautiful woman, who is anxious to assure him that it is excessive, if not altogether uncalled for.

"It never occurred to me that you would have remained at Bevis after Mrs. Drummond's death: that you had no relatives—I did not know—Miss Monro, what must you have thought of my note to Mrs. Manners?"

"I did not think it conveyed any slight to me. I was a little. more than a little, surprised that you took no notice, to myself, of Mrs. Drummond's letter."

"I—took no notice—Mrs. Drummond's letter! Miss Monro, I have not the remotest notion what you mean. Mrs. Drummond had not written a line to me for two years before her death."

"I assure you she did write to you. She told me none of the contents of her letter, but said that you would write to me when you should have received it. The letter was to be forwarded to you after her death by Mr. Cleeve. We found it as she had told me—and I took for granted that it had reached you."

"It never did reach me. And so, you must also have taken for granted that I behaved even worse than I have

been conscious of behaving, to imagine that I could have neglected such a letter, no matter what there was in it. And how kind and forgiving you have been! How shall I ever thank you enough?"

"I remained at Bevis," said Janet, and now she spoke with hardly-controlled emotion, "by her wish, waiting until you should write. She desired me to see you on your arrival—I was to have asked Mrs. Cathcart to receive me—and to hand to you, myself, the little packet that I left with Mrs. Manners, the box with the key in it. I knew no more then of the contents of the packet than of those of the letter. It was impossible for me to fulfil her wish; I now know why"

"And no doubt that letter contained instructions to me, and told me the meaning of the key!"

"I think it must be so."

"What can have become of it?"

Janet could make no suggestion in answer to this, and Dunstan began to walk about in his usual fashion when troubled or impatient. Recollecting himself after a few moments, he paused, and said:

"Is Mr. Cleeve a good man of business? Is he likely to have forgotten or mislaid the letter?"

"Mrs. Drummond thought highly of him. I have heard her say he was the most careful, though the least formal of lawyers."

"There was no reference to any enclosed letter in what he wrote to me. I could repeat his words." And he did so. "You may imagine my feelings. When that announcement reached me Esdaile was present, as perhaps he has told you. They would have been keener, and they might have been pleasanter, if, with the formal intimation of her bounty, I had received Mrs. Drummond's own explanation of it."

"I am sure of that, I am quite sure of that!" said Janet, and her eyes filled with tears. She turned her head away to hide them, and there was silence for a few moments. The

thoughts of each were engaged upon the same theme: the girl was picturing to her active fancy the scene of the reception of the news; the young man was recalling that scene in its minutest particulars, and with it the high hopes, the fond trust, the brief triumph which had all been his in addition. He had said just now that his feelings might possibly have been pleasanter; well, he had not meant to utter the least word of falsehood, but the reflection of a second, the merest flash of thought, made him remember, that the whole sum of content had been his in that moment which assured him of wealth—and Laura.

Strange how the agony, a little lulled of late, awoke now, thrilled through him, and mocked him! Strange that in a moment, while the interest of this matter that he was discussing was fresh and keen, there came to him the taste of the Dead Sea apple, sickening, revolting, as when his teeth had first ground the dust and ashes between them; that the great weariness fell upon him once more, and in the face of Janet there was no beauty, and in her speech no charm. The spell had not rested on him a minute, but he roused himself with a start, and glanced askance at Janet, as though she might have read even in that minute the secret of his bitterness and humiliation. But her head was still turned away; her fingers were busy with the leaves of a tall india-rubber plant in the window, and her breathing was slightly hurried.

"I will write to Mr. Cleeve by to-day's post," said Dunstan, "to inquire into this matter. It is a——"

At this moment Miss Susan entered the room, and, greeting Dunstan with her usual cordiality, told him that Dr. Andrews' visit to Esdaile had come to an end.

"Then I will go to him at once," said Dunstan, "for I can stay only a short time to-day."

He took leave of the two ladies, and left the room.

"I am sorry Captain Dunstan is in such a hurry," said Miss Susan, "for I was in hopes he would have dined with

us ; it would have been something to rouse us. But after what he has said it would be an empty compliment to ask him. Well, dear, added the placid old lady, settling herself comfortably to her knitting, "and how did poor Julia go off ?"

At Bury House a railway journey was even yet regarded as a serious undertaking.

Janet answered the question, but so absently that Miss Susan noticed her tone, and then she noticed her face.

"My dear Janet," she said, "you are quite pale and tired-looking. You and Julia sat up till morning, I'll be bound. Yes ! You did ! I thought so. Now you had better go and lie down until dinner-time."

Janet obeyed with great alacrity, in so far as leaving the room went ; she had so much to think of, it was a luxury to be alone. The explanation of Captain Dunstan's seeming neglect ; the frankness of his explanation ; the fate of the missing letter—these things would have been enough to fill her thoughts, but they were speedily crowded out by a subject far removed from them, one which dwarfed them and all other intruders ; the words Julia had whispered to her with her farewell kiss.

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile distinctly remembered the arrival of the lawyer's letter at Kandy, and that there was no enclosure in it, or any mention of one. Captain Dunstan wrote to Mr. Cleeve the same night from Bevis, and received by return of post a polite reply, in which the writer affirmed that he had forwarded to Captain Dunstan the letter in question, according to the directions of the late Mrs. Drummond, but added that, on referring to his letter-book, he found, to his great regret, he had omitted to call Captain Dunstan's attention to the fact that such a letter was enclosed in his own communication.

CHAPTER XXII.

AT THE CHANTRY.

"I HAVE been thinking," said Janet Monro to Amabel Ainslie, on the third day of Janet's visit to The Chantry, "that I am now, for the first time in my life, in a real home. I never before lived in a house where the family was complete, father, mother, and child. My sister-in-law has no child, there are no children at the Vicarage, there never was a child at Bevis—and with those three my experience ends. All the rest was school-life."

"And I am afraid we are not just a model of the family," said Amabel, from her accustomed station on the hearthrug, where she sat looking upwards at Janet, and making a pretty picture in the firelight. "I don't hit it off to perfection somehow, with any one except yourself; and that is because you have the patience of a saint, and that delightful way of knowing just what one means, and never taking one up wrongly"

"I think," said Janet, smiling gravely, "it is rather because you have formed an extravagant idea of my perfections. You are one of those who enthrone a king in their hearts, and then declare the king can do no wrong."

One of Amabel's inconvenient blushes came all over her face at these words, but Janet did not see it.

"Only" she went on, "it is a queen you have set up this time, and she feels anything but up to the mark."

"Now don't, Janet, don't!" said Amabel, eagerly, "for goodness' sake, don't tell me I must not be enthusiastic. Why shouldn't one? Lest one should be disappointed, the wise people say; but they seem to me like the old woman who would never cross the water because somebody belonging to her had been drowned. You could not disappoint me, I am sure, except by leaving off liking me the little bit you do like me—I am quite content with it, mind—and you

won't do that, because I have never pretended anything to you. You know me just as I am, I don't try to make myself out wiser, virtuouser, discreeter, better; and you know you have taken me as a friend, for better for worse, haven't you?"

"I have indeed."

"Well, then, do let me be enthusiastic. You do me so much good, Janet; you make me wonder how it is I am so much better off than far better people; you make me think of that horrid hymn I had to learn when I was a child, with its smug remark—

> 'For I am fed, while others starve
> Or beg from door to door.'

Why should I have home and parents, and such good ones too, although papa is tiresome sometimes, and I can't manage mamma? And why should you have neither home nor parents? Why are some people like the loose stones that roll upon a frozen pond, liable to be kicked aside into a hole at any moment, and other people so firmly rooted in prosperous circumstances, that nothing but a shaking of the earth itself could harm them?"

"Ah, why? Which of us can answer, or even guess that? I think the mysteries that are deepest, the problems that are hardest to solve, are those that hem us in on every side in all our daily life. One need not go far afield for wonders. But you were speaking of the difference between yourself and me; it is wide indeed. Outside accidental ties, there is only one human being in the world who is of kin to me, and she is not likely to live long. If my sister-in-law were gone there would be no one in the world whose 'business' it would be, no matter what should happen to me. That is a dismal feeling, but it makes one all the more thankful for friends, and especially," added Janet, with a softening of her tone, and a smile towards the tearful eyes of Amabel, "for a friend like you, so

whole-hearted and so partial. One wants partiality, indulgence, all the weak and merciful virtues in one's friends, when one is so lonely as I am. I had them"—Janet's voice sank, and her fingers were pressed together—"I had them all, from the friend who is gone. She was all that I ever knew of love and indulgence. A mother's may be greater, I don't know; if so, they must be vast indeed.

"One of the feelings that you cannot even imagine," continued Janet, "is the sudden fear like the start one sometimes wakes with in the dark, that comes to me at times when I remember that, after Janet is gone, there will be absolutely no one. I shall feel it less as I grow older, but I shall always feel it."

"And this Janet—Mrs. Monro—is she very nice?"

"She is remarkably like me in face, and, I believe, in character also; and therefore I know you would think her nice. She is a one-idea'd woman, and her one idea was, and is, my brother. Her husband, living, was the sole object of her existence, and he is the same dead. She has never recovered in any way from the shock of his death; and, indeed, how should she? nothing can alter the fact, or her relation to it. She began to die from the day she knew that his ship was lost, and she has not much of the journey to accomplish now."

"How strange it is," said Amabel, "how people differ in the way things affect them! Could you suffer so much, or so long, do you think? I mean, if you wished to do so, if you would not for the world lose the sense of desolation, could you hold to it in that way?"

"I cannot tell; I have not known such a grief, and one must know to answer."

"A one-idea'd woman," said Amabel, musingly; "not necessarily a bore, for all that—only held at anchor by her one idea, and safe, while he lived: safe now, also, according to what you say. Janet, where is she? Why are you not with her?"

"She is in France, somewhere in the south; I shall hear when she is settled. The doctors sent her away from Scotland, and I should perhaps have gone with her but for Mrs. Drummond's request. Not that Janet wants me; she wants nobody, although she is very kind to me. But Mrs. Drummond especially desired me to do as I have done."

"How very kind of her—to us! not that she was thinking of that. Is Mrs. Monro as beautiful as you are?"

Janet laughed, with unaffected merriment, at Amabel's question; it was put in such perfect good faith; and, for answer, slipped a small gold locket containing a coloured photograph off her watch-chain, and placed it in Amabel's hands. The portrait singularly resembled Janet; but for the colour of the hair, which was quite fair, it might have passed for a likeness of her.

"That was done the day before her wedding," said Janet, "when she was full of life and spirits; she is sadly altered now, she tells me."

"Is she quite alone?" asked Amabel, as she replaced the locket on Janet's chain.

"Quite. She prefers to be."

"Dreadful!" said Amabel, with very serious earnestness. "I hope I may never care so much for any human being as to be so utterly smashed as all that. Love can be enough, without being all, in that way."

"Do you think so, Amabel? I think not. Love cannot be enough unless it be everything. It must be all, or nothing. It has not been given to us, poor creatures, in its truth, to come short of that. I am sure it has not. The one motive, the one joy, the one assurance that life is worth living, the one ray that falls direct from heaven—when withdrawn, when quenched, can it be possible that any solicitude, or energy, or care for existence can remain?"

"I don't know," said Amabel frankly. "One sees people get on so well with one another, and then one sees them get on so well without one another, that it rather

puzzles me—I mean people who began by being in love, you know."

"Ah! I have never seen that. I have known but two households, and in each love was enough, because it was all, and stronger than death."

"Janet"—Amabel hesitated, and her face grew wistful—"if—if you were in love with anybody, I think—I am afraid you would be like your sister-in-law—I am afraid you would set all your heart and soul and life upon—him—and—oh, my dear Janet, how unhappy you would be!"

"Or how happy!" Her face was tinged with the beautiful colour which had come to it with Julia's whisper, and she spoke rather to herself than to her companion. Then there was silence for a little while, until Amabel broke it, by an abrupt question:

"Do you think men ever look at love in that serious light?"

"Ever! Why not? Is it not to them as it is to us, the ruler of their destinies? Why should there be any difference in their way of thinking and ours?"

Amabel could not have told Janet "why" there should be any difference, but she had an intimate conviction that there was. Her experience was not extensive, and it had been rather in observation of general flirtation than in that of the real passion or sentiment of love; but she caught Janet's meaning, and felt an uncomfortable conviction that the facts were against it.

"You see," she said, hesitatingly, "they live such different lives, and they have such different notions. Of course I don't know, no girl ever can, for our very brothers if we had any, would be utter mysteries to us; it's all guess-work; but I think men would rather we should not think of their promises and vows so seriously; that we should take things more lightly, I mean, and just get for ourselves, and let them get, as much ease and comfort and amusement out of life as possible."

She paused, and burst into laughter. There was astonishment so profound and unalloyed in Janet's face that it irresistibly amused Amabel.

"Pray forgive me," she said—"I could not help it; I never saw anything so funny as you looked. If you had been Alnaschar, and I had just come up behind you, 'unknownst,' like a *gamin de Bagdad*, and kicked over your basket of glass, you might have looked just like that. Don't mind me—believe your own doctrines; don't be converted to me; I'm as ignorant as Topsy, and I'm going to sing 'Robin Adair' for you. There's plenty of *grand sérieux* in that."

She jumped up, went to the piano, and sang the song, with the sweetness and expression which formed the charm of her singing. She felt strangely sorry for Janet, without putting her feeling into form in her thoughts; and this time it did not come from the dash of superstition that was in her. Janet remained by the fireside, her head drooping a little, her hands loosely folded on her lap. The light touched the lines of her black dress here and there, and the flickering flame threw her face into alternate shine and shadow.

The first effect of Amabel's words faded before her own thoughts; there came to her, with the tenderness and trustfulness breathed in music by the singer, a dear though timid hope. No less lofty, no more selfish should the real love be than the ideal she had formed, if indeed love was coming to illumine her life. With all the depth of her nature, she would have loved the man to whom her heart was given, all her life long, though she were never to be blessed with his love, and she would never have murmured at her lot. But if it were indeed true that he had loved her from the first, and she was soon to know that it was so, what inner deeps of devotion, of gratitude, of worship were in that heart for him!

Proud, simple, ignorant, and imaginative, Janet had great humility of spirit also, believing unfeignedly that of the vast,

royal, free gift of true love, she was little worthy. She had made no "conquests;" the very alphabet of flirtation was a sealed mystery to her; no flutter or self-conscious embarrassment of any kind troubled her in the presence of any man. The one feeling which she cherished was too deep and solemn for those minor manifestations; the flash of gratified vanity had never lighted up those limpid eyes which answered the glance of man or woman with precisely the same serene look.

To men whom no woman charms unless she have the love of coquetry, Janet was not charming, for she could not have learned, with any amount of pains, those simplest lessons in the art which many a girl-child finds as easy as breathing. She had a natural taste for the becoming, and a fine sense of order, but she had never in her life studied an effect in her dress, or bestowed a thought upon her face from any wish to attract admiration. The circumstances of her life had helped to preserve intact the simplicity and purity of heart with which she had been endowed by nature.

If, indeed, he had loved her from the first, with what hushed wonder, with what unbounded gratitude would she recognise the blessedness of her fate. Steady memory, faithful affection, and abiding regret were in her heart also, for the constancy of Janet's nature was as full and complete as were her other qualities and defects. But the world was beautiful to her, and life was very dear; in a little while it might become infinitely, awfully precious. In that idle hour, as she sat in the firelight, the dim November twilight sinking into the dark November night, and listened to Amabel's singing, everything seemed beautiful to her, and all the purposes of Providence for her to be setting fair in a wonderful and undreamed-of way.

At length Amabel ceased singing, and, announcing that it was time to dress, she took Janet by the arm, and they went upstairs together. Amabel entered Janet's room with her, poked the fire up, looked in the glass, seemed to be on the point of taking herself off, but at last said, impetuously:

"I want you to promise me something, Janet. Will you?"

"What is it?"

"That you will never, never, never, so long as you live, lose sight of me so long as I live, or part from me—in heart, I mean, one cannot answer for place in this world. I want you to feel that never, never, never can you be quite alone again, or can I lose you by one of those life-losses which I have always thought must be the hardest. Will you promise me, Janet? I don't care in the least whether it's silly or not—I want your promise."

Janet gave it; and Amabel left her.

"I wonder what put that into my head?" said Amabel to herself, gravely, as she again contemplated that pretty head in the glass in her own room; "something did. I could not help it; I am always having odd feelings about her, as if she were going to vanish, or coming to grief."

Janet's visit to The Chantry had proved, so far, a decided success. Mr. Ainslie had liked her from the first; she was the only young woman he had seen in England who took a real interest in India, and sincerely wished to know all about the native princes, and peoples, and that ancient civilisation on which Western insolence looks down; and he enjoyed the fuller opportunity of talking of India which her sojourn in his own house afforded. Mrs. Ainslie knew in five minutes after her arrival that Miss Monro understood nerves, and was accustomed to consider the ways of an invalid with patience and sympathy. There was something in her presence which soothed the fretful and indolent woman.

"She's like double windows and noiselessly swinging doors; she's like perfect ventilation, and perpetual oil to consequently never-creaking hinges; she's like glasses that don't tire the eyes; she's grateful and comforting, like the cocoa that people do not take at breakfast; in short, she's like every alleviation of life in the sick-room and out of it, and there's nobody like her." Such was Amabel's report to Mrs. Cathcart, and the elder lady, while smiling at the

younger one's odd way of expressing her meaning, smiled too with pleasure in the fulfilment of her own anticipations.

Amabel had left Janet with Mrs. Ainslie, and gone to the Vicarage alone. The two gentlemen from Bevis were to dine at The Chantry on the following day, and Amabel wanted to borrow a music-book.

The day was fine, one of those soft November days which are so dismal in town, but often beautiful in the country Janet had read Mrs. Ainslie into a comfortable sleep, and was walking in the shrubbery, enjoying her solitude, when a step upon the gravel warned her that it was about to be invaded. A bend in the walk and a great bush of laurustinus hid the intruder from her for a minute; the next she saw Sir Wilfrid Esdaile. He explained that Mr. Ainslie had told him he should find her in the shrubbery.

Sir Wilfrid was looking well, but the recent accident had changed him a good deal. The floridness of his complexion, his frank, untroubled, careless expression had given place to a more interesting if less robust colouring, and to a look of thought. Something of agitation in his manner and voice as he addressed her struck Janet as strange, and she looked at him inquiringly. Nothing could be more profound than her unconsciousness that she was connected with that agitation.

"Has anything happened?" she asked, standing still when he had accosted her, and letting her hand rest in his, unconsciously; "have you come to tell me anything?"

"No, no, there's nothing wrong. May I walk with you?"

She assented, drew her hand away, and moved on.

"I thought," she said, "you looked as if something was the matter; and as Miss Ainslie is out, in the pony-carriage, and I have not unlimited confidence in Jack and Jill, I fancied she might have got into trouble."

"No, there is no one in trouble." He took his hat off, passed his hand across his forehead, glanced at her calm, lovely face, and said: "That is to say, no one is in trouble

except myself. Miss Monro, do you know that this is the first time I have ever been alone with you?"

"Is it, Sir Wilfrid? I did not know."

"It is the very first time; and how I have longed for this opportunity! I could not ask for it here, and it never came at Bury House; though I think Miss Carmichael would have got me a chance if she could."

He was speaking hurriedly, vehemently, and a dim apprehension began to steal over her. At this mention of Julia, a strange sensation, as if she were passing through icy cold air, took possession of her. Julia's whisper! What had it meant? Surely not this, not what she felt, with a dreadful pang of fear and misery, was coming! Not this, that she had never thought of, never dreamed of, until half a minute ago!

He saw her cheek turn burning red; he felt her quicken her pace, and he laid his hand on her arm, gently but firmly, and stopped her.

"Miss Monro," he said, getting out the words with difficulty, "will you not do for me what you did for Katinka? Will you not put me out of pain?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

"OUT OF PAIN."

"I DON'T think," said Sir Wilfrid, speaking with great fire and earnestness, "that you can be surprised; I think you must know there must be something to tell you, that I love you; that I have loved you from the first; that the whole of my life is changed; that I have only one hope, one wish in all the world—to win you. I did not mean, I did not think I should have dared to say this yet; but I got the chance, and I have said it."

All that she feared had come upon Janet. At Sir Wilfrid's last words, Janet put her hands before her face.

Her heart was beating painfully, there was a ringing sound in her ears, and her limbs grew heavy. She had never fainted in her life, but she thought this must be fainting. She pointed to a garden bench near, and Sir Wilfrid, exceedingly frightened by her paleness and silence, led her to it, with many incoherent apologies, and much blaming of himself.

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile had a good deal less vanity than most men possess, and just then he was full of humility and apprehension of a deep and true love, experienced for the first time in his life, and totally unlike anything which he had ever imagined that sentiment to be. He did not know how to account for Janet's agitation; but neither did he interpret it favourably to himself and his cause. In the face which she now turned on him, as with a strong effort she rallied from her sudden faintness, there was pain and regret, but little embarrassment; and when he begged her to pardon his abruptness, and called himself, with lavish iteration, an idiot and a fool for having startled her thus, she said with tears, that it "was not that."

"Then what is it?" he asked. "You cannot be—you are not angry with me. You will answer me, Miss Monro—Janet—you will tell me, is there any hope for me? I am not such a fool as to think you might be easily won, or that you could care much for me yet, but I will try—I will try very hard to be just a little worthy of so great a treasure, if you will trust me with your happiness, with yourself. I think I should be a good man if you would be my wife, and I know that no man living could love you better than I do. You are the only woman I have ever even imagined that I loved, and my life would be valueless to me henceforth without you."

The force and simplicity of his appeal touched Janet keenly. She knew at that moment, at least, that she would have loved this man if she could. But it was impossible, and she was sorry for him with all the heart that she

could not give him. Her mind was in a whirl; but this at least was distinct in it, that she was sorry for him, and also for another—that a great ruin had come upon much peace and fair-seeming.

It was only a few seconds that the silence lasted, but Sir Wilfrid "feared his fate too much" to misinterpret it. He knew she was going to refuse him. He was standing at the end of the garden bench, his head bent towards her; while he spoke, her downcast eyes were hidden from him, but after the brief pause she raised them to his face, with the same look of ineffable truth and gentleness that had struck him when he saw her first. The same; no deeper light of love was in it, no happy shrinking from the light of love in his.

"I wish," she said—"I wish you had not said—that you did not feel—oh, Sir Wilfrid, I am so very sorry, but—this cannot be."

"Don't say that—don't tell me that." He seated himself by her side, and caught her hands in his. She did not withdraw them. "I know," he went on rapidly, "that you do not know much of me, that I have spoken too soon, and I never could tell you how strongly I feel that I don't deserve you, that no man ever could; but I implore you not to send me away from you quite hopeless. Don't do that—don't do that. Let me try for the prize of your love; give me time—the prayer of all the condemned is my prayer to you. I love you, Janet—I love you with so great and true a love that there must be some chance for me. I cannot believe that there is none. You have been so good, so sweet to me, and you are so boundlessly, so unspeakably dear. I don't mean to say," he added, with a quick interpretation of something in her face, and trying to prevent her from speaking, "that I ever had the least right to think you cared for me—you would have been just as good and as sweet to Dunstan or anybody else—but you don't blame me for trying, do you? And you will not send me quite away?"

"No," she said, "not quite away. Let me speak to you now as frankly as you have spoken. You do not know how sorry I am—how little I ever dreamed of this."

"Who but yourself would have believed that I could see you as I have seen you, and not love you? Don't think that I only admire you, for although I did not know that there was such beauty in the world as there is in your face, it is a great deal more than that. You are like an angel or a saint to me, and also the fairest of women. All my fate, all my future, are in your hands."

"Not so," said Janet, gravely, and gently loosing herself from his hold; "no one's fate, no one's future, can ever be in the keeping of another; and yours I trust will be bright and happy, though I cannot be your wife. Pray let me tell you how deeply I feel the honour you do me by the wish——"

"That s the old story," said he, bitterly; "that is the correct thing that young ladies were supposed to say in the good books. You might say something different, I think, and truer."

"Nothing could be truer. You do honour me, and I do feel it."

"I do *not* honour you; nobody could offer you a heart and hand worthy of your acceptance; and you only feel vexed with me, but are too kind to show it, and perhaps a little sorry"

"Much more than a little; if I am to blame——"

"You are not to blame, except for being so good and so beautiful. I am a dull fellow, and I dare say I plead my cause awkwardly; but I am telling you the exact truth when I tell you that all my life is in your hands. Surely you believe me. Say that you believe me!"

"I believe you, Sir Wilfrid, indeed I do; but you distress me infinitely. I don't know how to beg of you to say no more—so that—you shall know that I am grateful——"

"Grateful! You grateful to me, and because I love

you! Would it be possible for you to conceive the absurdity of what you are saying? I distress you! I would not do that, heaven knows! Why should you be distressed by knowing the truth? I ought to have concealed it longer, in the interests of my chance, perhaps, but I couldn't. Don't say that I distress you; do give me a little hope?"

His voice was broken, and all the smooth, careless prosperity, the "surface look," which rendered Sir Wilfrid so much less interesting in appearance than Edward Dunstan, was crushed and crumpled out of his face by his intense anxiety.

"I cannot, I cannot."

"And why? At least tell me why."

"Because—because I could not return the feeling you have for me," said Janet, speaking faintly, and again feeling the painful beating of her heart, and the ringing sound in her ears; "I have the greatest esteem and regard for you——"

"That is like the 'gratitude' you talked of just now! What are esteem and regard to a man who wants love?"

"You have answered your own question, Sir Wilfrid. They are nothing, and therefore I cannot give you the hope you ask me for."

"Don't say that," he exclaimed, eagerly. "I am a fool! I have blundered again! How could I say that esteem and regard from you are nothing! They are much, they are almost everything, for they are at least sure foundations for another feeling, for the feeling I want; which may come in time. You do not love me now—I did not think, I did not dare to hope that you loved me; but I will hope for the future; don't say I must not, say that you will go on liking me, and that you will let me pass my life in trying to turn that liking into love. I have read that those marriages are the happiest in which there is more love on the husband's side than on the wife's, and I dare say it is very true. I will love you, Janet, as well as the truest

lover that ever was in a book, or in the world, loved, and prize you as highly as ever a woman was prized, if you will be my wife. You shall do anything you like, I will live anywhere you like; I don't want, I don't care about anything in the world, except the boon of winning you. I will wait any time, and never worry you about it, if you will only say that some day or other I shall succeed. For heaven's sake don't cry because I am begging my life at your hands; and don't turn your face away from me with that sorrowful look in it. No, you shall not speak until I have said this. You are the most unselfish of women, and I offer you a man's whole life to rule and govern; won't you take it, and do him good all his days? I think, I believe, I could make your life a happy one; I know that mine would be too blest if you would listen to me."

"That would be doing you evil instead of good," said Janet, "believe me. I am only a girl, and I know nothing of the world; but I am sure that a woman can do a man no greater wrong than to marry him if she does not love him. I could not do you that wrong, Sir Wilfrid; I cannot be your wife."

"But you do like me—and you might come to love me, if you would only try."

This was surely the simplest form in which a lover ever urged a suit which was rapidly approaching the condition of a forlorn hope; but Sir Wilfrid's earnestness made it pathetic. The sterling honesty that was in Janet answered to his homely appeal.

"Sir Wilfrid," she said, "I cannot try."

And then, as he received her words in silence, she rose, and adding, "Let us speak of this no more," made a few steps away from the bench. Sir Wilfrid was by her side in an instant.

"You ask the impossible," he said, hurriedly; "I cannot part with you thus. I would not offend you for the world, and I cannot think you will be offended if I say that

you have said too much or not enough. You have given me the right to believe that you like me as a friend——"

"As a friend," she repeated.

"And I prize that right very highly; but you could scarcely feel even so much regard as that for me, really, and yet coldly and deliberately make up your mind that you cannot try to love me, unless—unless there is some other reason. Dearest Janet—for you will always be dearest to me, whatever may happen—do not leave me in wretched suspense. For the second time I ask you to put me out of pain; this time to trust me. You cannot even try to love me, you tell me. Is it because some other man has been more fortunate than I?"

They had walked on a few paces before she spoke.

"Will you not tell me?" he urged. "I think you might trust me a little when you are hitting me so hard."

"No other man," she said, at length, "is what you call 'more fortunate.' I am not engaged."

"But there is some other man whom you love!"

She made no answer, but walked more quickly and with her face averted.

"Ah!—I see. There ends my dream and my hope. You will never change, nor shall I. I hope you are not angry with me for wanting to find this out."

"Oh, no, no."

"I could not help it; no one could be expected to give up such a woman as you are, if she did not quite hate him, while there was a chance for him. 'While there's life there's hope,' they say, but there's neither life nor hope for me in this, now that *I know*. Well, I must bear it; but I shall always love you, and always believe the man you love to be the most enviable in the world."

"We shall still be friends?"

"Shall we? I don't know." There came a sudden remembrance to him of the scorn and bitterness with which Dunstan had commented on Laura Thornton's proposal to

him that he and she should be "friends," and he too felt similar wrath and impatience. These women, who had the making or the marring of men's lives in their hands, what did they understand of men's feelings or ways of thinking?

"I hope so," said Janet, gently, "I have so few friends. And, Sir Wilfrid, I am not happier than you."

"I think you must be. No one could be more unhappy than you have made me. And yet, no, I have no right to say that; it is my own folly after all. Let me tell you how it was that I so deceived myself; how it was that it never occurred to me you could have cared for any one. They had told me about you, though only a little—Mrs. Cathcart and Dunstan, I mean—about your having come from Bury House to Mrs. Drummond, and I knew from Dunstan already how lonely the life at Bevis was in her time; that she was quite a recluse, and you were, of course, the same. I had never heard the name of any man mentioned as a visitor at Bevis, and there certainly was nothing in your manner—— However, what is the use of my going over all this? It is enough that I never thought of such a thing. Forgive me, if it has been painful to you to let me know it; it has been much more merciful to me. I cannot bear it very well, as yet; but I will try."

"Sir Wilfrid," said Janet, with great earnestness, "I am not insensible to the generosity of all you say, though I am quite unable to express what I feel. Would you mind—would you think it unkind if I asked you to leave me for to-day? I do not feel well, and Miss Ainslie will soon return; I want to be alone for awhile. We shall meet to-morrow."

"But not like this. To-morrow I must look and talk as if you were no more than others to me; I shall not be able to speak to you, even to tell you how wretched you have made me."

"It is better so, indeed it is. We should both be more unhappy than we are if it were otherwise. Let me leave you now, you had better stay: I will go into the house. Good-bye."

She turned into a side-walk of the shrubbery, and was out of sight in a moment, leaving Sir Wilfrid full of the grief and bitterness of his disappointment, but conscious also that she was looking extremely ill. He had never before seen her moved from that gentle composure which rendered her presence soothing even to those who did not recognise its influence, and, although she was beautiful in his eyes in every mood, he could not but see how much she suffered from agitation, how the intensity and depth of her nature came out, and her feelings told upon her.

He had no mind to enter the house again, to encounter Mr. Ainslie possibly, but Mrs. Ainslie certainly, for the short afternoon was closing in, and Mrs. Ainslie managed to get so far as the drawing-room every day at about that hour. He was acquainted with a short cut to the high-road by way of the farmyard, and he took himself off the premises by that route, carrying with him a heavier heart than had ever before sank within his breast.

It did seem hard; any one must have conceded that to the poor fellow, with whom life had hitherto gone so very smooth that he was to be excused for his limited comprehension of its possibilities of ill to himself and to other people. It did seem hard that he could not have his heart's desire in this one respect. He was not given to over-estimating his own advantages, or, indeed, to thinking at all about them; but as he walked on, with the irregular pace of a man whose thoughts are full of trouble, and his eyes unobservant of external things, he could not but dwell upon the irony of fate that had rendered the good gifts of wealth, position, liberty, love, home, all that he had to offer, quite barren, while she who refused them possessed none of these things.

The loneliness of Janet Monro's lot in life was the first circumstance concerning her that had made any impression upon him. To what a bright and happy home-life he would have changed that loneliness if she would have let him do so! And now, what was he to do with his own life? His thoughts ran entirely in the past tense; he did not deceive

himself—he knew there was no hope for him. Janet loved another man, and the steadfastness that made her character as beautiful as her face left no room for hope that she would ever change. In the smarting pain of Esdaile's disappointment there was no anger; the rage that being baffled awakes in natures more self-loving than his did not tear and torture Sir Wilfrid.

He loved her better than before, it seemed to him, and he could be sorry for her even as she was for him. He could feel for Dunstan now, and, among other whirling thoughts, came the recollection of his insufficient sympathy with his friend, and the somewhat contemptuous impatience with which he had observed how Dunstan undervalued all the good turns that fate had done him, just because fate had played him one scurvy trick. Dunstan was right, or, at least, if not right, helpless in the clutch of a trouble which Esdaile could not estimate. If love is enough, nothing else suffices; so felt this young man whose lot was fairly enviable, and had many a time been envied.

Who was the man whom Janet loved? "I am not engaged," Janet had said; and again, "I am no happier than you." Sir Wilfrid, before he knew anything about love, would have been likely to think that a high-minded girl like Janet could not possibly have given her heart unasked to any man; but he had no such stuff in his thoughts now; he would now have regarded with scorn the "curious fool" who should bring upon himself the question:

Is human love the growth of human will?

There was somewhere in the world a man whom Janet loved, and either he was unconscious or heedless of the great prize which he had but to take, or there was some obstacle in the way as insurmountable as that which lay in his own, and shut out all beyond from his gaze. He might never know which of these two solutions was the true one; he who had cheered up Dunstan, and substantially helped John Sandilands, each in a love-trouble, though widely different

in kind, could give no help, nay, could not even learn the truth here.

He had crossed the farmyard and a field beyond it, and stepped over a stile into the high-road, when he heard that ringing of her ponies' bells which always announced the coming of Miss Ainslie, and presently her little carriage came along at a great pace, Jack and Jill being of their mistress's opinion as to the advisability of getting home. The road was already darkening, and Sir Wilfrid easily hid himself in the shadow made by the trunk of a great leafless tree, while the pretty equipage went by him. He was not in spirits for any of Miss Ainslie's lively talk just then.

"She is light-hearted, at all events," thought Sir Wilfrid; "it is a good thing somebody is happy. Long may she remain so." He was softened by the trouble he was in; at least, for the present, and in this first phase of it.

When the morrow came, with the prospect of seeing Janet again in the evening, Sir Wilfrid began to doubt whether he ought to go to The Chantry with Dunstan. There was a contest in his feelings, but the longing to see her won. The friends drove over to The Chantry, and found all its inmates assembled in the drawing-room. Janet had taken refuge in the eternal photograph album, which is either a bore or a blessing on most social occasions, and, the other persons who were expected to join the party arriving soon after, there was no opportunity for the awkwardness which she had dreaded especially on acount of the sharp eyes of Amabel. The fervent affection of her lively and observant friend rendered all Janet said, and did, and looked, unfailingly interesting to her; but on this occasion she was placed on the same side of the table, and at a safe distance.

Captain Dunstan found Sir Wilfrid a dull enough companion on their way to The Chantry; on their way home he never spoke at all; and Dunstan began to think he must still be feeling the effects of his recent illness. It

never occurred to him, although his own bitterness was only beginning to yield to the influence of time and the irrevocable, that any sentimental trouble could have come to his friend. As they were parting for the night, Dunstan said to Sir Wilfrid that he feared he was not quite right yet, and Sir Wilfrid acknowledged that he was not very well. Next morning he told Dunstan that he thought he had better run up to town and see Dr. Lovel, a capital fellow, who understood him thoroughly—Esdaile had never had a day's illness in his life—and indeed it would not make much difference, for he must have left Bevis in a week or so, there were always so many business matters to be looked after at that time of the year. Dunstan regretted this necessity very much, but they would soon meet; he should not care about Bevis after Christmas: the hunting was not good, and the country was cold—in fact, he thought a little sunshine would not be amiss: and what would Sir Wilfrid say to the Riviera? Sir Wilfrid would say nothing to the Riviera for the present: there was time enough.

The end of it was that when Miss Ainslie drove over that day to the Vicarage, she found Sir Wilfrid Esdaile making his adieux to Mrs. Cathcart, whom he had just charged to explain his sudden departure at The Chantry. Miss Ainslie received the statement with less than her usual kindliness, and with none of her usual vivacity; she was absent in her manner while he stayed, and after he had gone away Mrs. Cathcart, to whom this was a new mood of her pretty cousin's, asked her what ailed her. To her great surprise, Amabel, who was standing in the bay of the library window, and gazing out upon the lawn, looked round at her with tearful eyes.

"Nothing," she answered, "or, at least, not much; only one of my follies; one of my absurd presentiments which make me as miserable, until I can contrive to forget them, as all the wisdom of the Grecian sages could make me; and," she added, rallying herself, "that must have been pretty dreadful."

'How can you be so absurd?" said Mrs. Cathcart. "Some more broken bones for Sir Wilfrid, I suppose?"

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile went up to London that same afternoon. It was strange how he was haunted, as he sat in the railway carriage, holding a newspaper between his troubled face and the outer world, by two lines of a poem, of which he had forgotten every word besides; two lines that sprang up from some dim corner of memory in which he knew not that he had ever stored them. They were these:

> For I can bear my own despair,
> But not another's hope.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LITTLE KEY.

Captain Dunstan had expressed himself to Sir Wilfrid disparagingly and discontentedly in relation to Bevis, and things in general, but he was not so ill-pleased as he appeared. Easy circumstances, popularity among his neighbours, and the influence of the irrevocable, in the matter of that great grief which had at first threatened to act like a canker at the root of all the good that fate had wrought him, were working together to render Edward Dunstan happier than he had expected to be. Not that he would have admitted the fact in his still-recurring hours of gloom, when the great house was so terribly empty because the figure that he had placed there, by the power of fancy, was destined to be for ever absent, and the privileges of his lot were forgotten in the pangs of despised love. He would have refused, in such hours, to acknowledge that he was beginning to enjoy life; but the hours became fewer, and they recurred less frequently When by any chance he heard of Laura and her husband, Dunstan had a fit of gloom and bitterness, but he heard of them seldom. Mr. and Mrs. Thornton did not belong to the great world whose movements are recorded for the consolation of that large majority of mankind whose movements are of no consequence, and

as yet they happily had no history. Dunstan had sometimes wondered whether Julia Carmichael really knew anything about the past. She had occasionally mentioned her cousin in his hearing, and he had told her that he was acquainted with her uncle, Lady Rosa Chumleigh, and Mrs. Thornton; but there had never been the least hint of any further knowledge on the part of either, and the one indication from which Dunstan might have concluded that Julia was in her cousin's confidence did not come under his notice. This was the fact, that when he was not present, Julia frequently talked of Mr. and Mrs. Thornton to Sir Wilfrid Esdaile and Janet Monro; but, as Sir Wilfrid was as careful in his avoidance of the subject with Dunstan as Julia was, he made no allusion to what she said.

Thus absence and silence were helping the irrevocable to heal a wound more grievous than might have been supposed, considering that the victim had not one of those strong natures which are dowered with the faculty of suffering *à outrance*, and with the tenacity which accompanies strength. But Laura had completely captivated Edward Dunstan, as a woman very far her superior in all respects might have failed to do, by her entire suitability to himself. All his life long she would be to him the one woman whose presence would have been the completion of good, notwithstanding that anger burned within him when he dwelt upon the thought of her, and many a harsh epithet rose to his lips at those times when his sorrow "woke and cried."

Captain Dunstan was a favourite with women; his manners were good, and he had that peculiar charm of an apparently inexhaustible leisure to devote to the matter in hand which is especially attractive to Englishwomen, because they so rarely meet with it among their male belongings.

It was a valuable item in the sum of that good luck which Amabel Ainslie declared to be written on his forehead, that he had won Mrs. Cathcart's liking from the first; for the Vicar's wife was a power in the neighbourhood. She had been impressed by Amabel's slighting estimate of

Dunstan, and had observed him for herself, after her cousin's frank declaration of her belief in the pre-occupation of his affections had obliged her to relinquish the notion that the mistress of Bevis might be found at The Chantry. The result was that she now rated him more highly than Amabel did, and that she formed a second hope for his future and that of one whom she held to be "much too good for any man."

Captain Dunstan had become a frequent visitor at the Vicarage, and before long he had confided to Mrs. Cathcart his two main difficulties; the one, that he had not the least notion of "how to do good to the poor and that kind of thing;" the other, that there was a mystery about some wishes, or intentions, or injunctions of Mrs. Drummond's, which he could not get at, and that the subject was evidently embarrassing to Miss Monro. From the first of these difficulties Mrs. Cathcart undertook to extricate him; not, indeed, by the ready expedient of becoming his almoner, but by undertaking to teach him what so many live and die without learning—the truth respecting the lives and the needs of the poor. To the second she could bring no solution.

The hearty admiration with which Captain Dunstan spoke of Janet was the first means by which he had won Mrs Cathcart's favour, and, as he observed that she was interested in the topic, he recurred to it in his amiable way on the next opportunity. The peculiar circumstances justified a good deal of curiosity on his part, and also warranted the gratification of it by Mrs. Cathcart; and as Dunstan went to and fro between Bevis and Bury House, and made a point of bringing news of Sir Wilfrid and their common friends to the Vicarage almost daily, Mrs. Cathcart began to hope that he was learning to appreciate Janet as much as it was in him to do, and that Amabel's notion was unfounded. The idea was so delightful that Mrs. Cathcart had not strength of mind to scrutinise it all round, and to argue against its probability just in proportion to its

pleasantness. She had no idea whether Janet was favourably impressed by Captain Dunstan, and she felt certain that Janet would be hard to win; but, supposing he were really to try, would not all the probabilities be in favour of his success?

In Janet's case no former feeling had to be suppressed, no disappointment or treachery to be survived. Mrs. Cathcart could look back at the years during which she had known Janet without recalling the slightest indication that she had ever been attracted by any man.

Mrs. Cathcart was not one to overlook the existence of another side to any question, however deeply she might be interested in her own side of it. She went nearest to doing this, however, when she made up her mind that either Amabel was mistaken, or Dunstan's former love had been in some way a failure—a supposition for which she had not a scrap of evidence—and, by way of compensation, she thought seriously about the value of time and opportunity in the possible working out of her wishes.

Dunstan was but newly come to his kingdom; he had not yet been competed for, as young men who are notoriously good matches are competed for, even in country places which call themselves quiet and respectable, and the disproportion between his worldly position and that of Janet could hardly fail to be impressed upon him with deterrent effect, if, supposing him to be "thinking of" her at all, he did not put the matter out of the reach of argument, innuendo, or ambitious promptings. Dunstan was, indeed, as free from obligation to consult anybody's opinion or pleasure except his own as any man could be; but no one is independent of influence, and of the kind of persuasion and suggestion that in such matters is almost atmospheric.

A few days had elapsed since Sir Wilfrid Esdaile's departure from Bevis; the weather was so dismally wet and cold that not even Amabel would brave the elements and drive over from The Chantry to the Vicarage, so that Mrs. Cathcart did not see her or Janet. Amabel had, however,

informed her by a note that they were all weather-bound, and that Janet had been anything but well, and she was sitting by the fire in the library, with the note in her hand, when Captain Dunstan was announced.

"How good of you to come and cheer me up this horrid day," said Mrs. Cathcart, who had perceived, with her first glance at Dunstan, that there was some purpose more than ordinary in his visit; "the rain has beaten even Miss Ainslie."

"I am glad of it; I was afraid I should not find you alone. Rather an odd thing has happened. You remember about the letter that Mrs. Drummond left, to be forwarded to me after her death, and which did not reach me?"

"Yes, I remember."

"It has reached me at last. In a very strange way—through Esdaile."

"How in the world did he come to have it?"

"You shall hear. This is what he writes:

"'I fancy the enclosed must be the missing letter which the lawyer was so positive he had forwarded to you. How it came to be among my papers I cannot understand. I found it, only a few minutes ago, in searching among a lot of things I had brought back from Ceylon, for a paper which Sandilands wants. I hope it is Mrs. Drummond's letter; it will be a satisfaction, if so, to you and to Miss Monro.'

"'Then there's something about himself. But the fact is, the enclosure is the missing letter."

"How very strange! How relieved Janet will be! How glad you must be! You have been anxious for some knowledge of Mrs. Drummond's wishes."

"Yes," said Dunstan, with embarrassment; "only this is a curious thing, so very unlike what I remember and should have expected of Mrs. Drummond. The letter is marked 'private,' but it reaches me under circumstances so different from those which she anticipated, that I think I am justified in asking you to read it. You are the only friend I have here, and you know more about her, and the

place too, than I do. If I had had this letter at the right time I should have kept it to myself, of course ; but——"

Dunstan did not finish his sentence, and Mrs. Cathcart, though full of curiosity, did not help him by a word.

"Will you read it, and advise me ?" he said, at length, and placed in her hands the message from the dead.

Carefully written, in small, close characters, and bearing date three months prior to her death, Mrs. Drummond's last words to the inheritor of her fortune were as follows :

"You will receive, together with the communication I am about to make to you, an unexpected and welcome announcement ; that of your inheritance of the whole of your honoured uncle's property. I have decided upon making you my sole heir. It is not my intention here to enter upon the motives which have actuated me in taking this course ; if you ever discover them, it will be under circumstances of still greater interest and importance to yourself. I only think it necessary to say that they are in no wise connected with any views entertained or wishes expressed by Admiral Drummond. I act entirely by my free will, and from considerations which do not arise from the occurrences or relations of the past.

"You will be glad to come into possession of Bevis, and you may perhaps feel an impulse of gratitude towards my memory, although you have never liked me, and I have never liked you. I am willing to acknowledge, writing, as I do, words which you will not read until I shall have passed out of the sphere of human judgment, that our mutual dislike arose more by my fault than yours. You are a young man of the modern pattern, and that pattern is not to my taste ; you are unlike your uncle, whom I loved, honoured, and obeyed, and I would have had you like him. When I have said this I have said all, and I confess to a prejudice, which I record here only because I think it right also to acknowledge that I do not think you will make a bad use of wealth which in your uncle's hands did good to

many. I leave no charges on the estate that will be yours when you read these lines, I hamper your action in nothing; but I am about to express a few wishes, and these I believe you will fulfil.

"There is in the world I am shortly to leave one person whom I love, and for whose future I am solicitous—my companion, Janet Monro. She has been the best, the dearest, the most patient of friends to me, and she will be nearly friendless when you read these lines. I have made a small provision for her (all that she could by any means be induced to accept) derived from funds originally my own—not belonging to the estate, or even to the ready-money bequeathed to me by your uncle; so that in future she shall be secured from dependence. This, however, does not alter the fact that she will be almost alone in the world, and that her old home, in which she lived as a daughter, must pass away from her; and therefore I ask you, as the one only proof of your kindly memory of one who might have been kinder to you, and who feels that strongly now, to befriend Janet Monro; to place yourself in communication with her immediately on receiving this letter, and to consult her wishes with respect to her leaving Bevis. Finally—this you may perhaps find an irksome condition—I wish you to reside uninterruptedly at Bevis for three months after the estate shall have come into your hands.

"I have little to add, beyond an injunction, which may seem to you fanciful, but which will explain itself in due time. I beg your close heed to it. You will be handed by Janet Monro, when you see her for the first time after your arrival at Bevis, a key. She knows nothing of the receptacle it belongs to, and it is my desire that you make no reference to it. In the old bureau that stands between the windows in my room there is a range of pigeon-holes, with a square space shut in by a little door in the centre; the key I allude to unlocks that door. When you have lived three months at Bevis, if in all other respects you have carried out my wishes, if you have made a friend of Janet Monro, if you

have won her confidence and esteem, then, and in that case only, I wish you to open the sealed packet I have placed in the bureau as above described. If for any reason you have not done these things, you will not break the seals, but will destroy the packet unopened. I enjoin on you also, in the case of your having contracted an engagement, or intending to contract an engagement to marry, to destroy the sealed packet unopened, immediately on your arrival at Bevis. The matter which I intend to be made known to you, under the circumstances I have explained, is one which I would wish to be known to none but you, and to you only as the possessor of Bevis.

"I have no more to say, except that I hope you will so live in the place where the good repute of the just will keep your uncle's memory green, that all who know you, and who remember him, may acknowledge that I have done right.

"MARGARET DRUMMOND."

Dunstan observed Mrs. Cathcart attentively while she read this letter, and saw that her surprise was extreme.

"Did you find the sealed packet there?" was her first question.

"Yes. I had never been in the room until to-day. The admiral's corridor, as they call it, is shut up in general; but I made it a visit after I had read the letter, and found the room just as I remembered it, with the bureau between the windows, and in the bureau the packet, done up in parchment, and addressed to me."

"You left it there?"

"Naturally; the time is not up, even if I had a right to break the seals, according to the conditions of this strange letter. It is very frank, is it not?"

"Very, and characteristic of the writer. It is a pity you and she were not better friends. The upsetting of all Mrs. Drummond's plans by the accident that her letter did not reach you is strange; but I think circumstances have fulfilled them almost as fully as intent could have done.

You have resided at Bevis uninterruptedly since your return to England. You have seen a great deal of Janet, and I think I may safely add that, without any prompting, you and she are good friends."

"You may, indeed," said Dunstan. "Who could fail to appreciate Miss Monro? Still I wish I had known. Many things might have been done which she would have liked."

"I think not, really No, there is nothing to regret, no harm has been done except that you have had some unnecessary uneasiness. All has been just as Mrs. Drummond would have wished it to be, and when the time comes you will be entitled to break the seals of this mysterious and tantalising parcel, of which Janet is to know nothing. And indeed," added Mrs. Cathcart, "now that I consider the letter carefully, I see no one but yourself was intended to know anything of its existence. Captain Dunstan, I ought not to have seen this, you ought not to have given it to me to read."

"I am afraid—I believe I ought not, but I did not know what to do, I wanted advice so much. There was no use in telling you about one part of the letter, and not telling you about the other. And neither of us is any the wiser, you know, about the matter which I am to keep to myself. I shall do that, of course."

"Of course," assented Mrs. Cathcart, with renunciation almost noble.

"I suppose I may claim—and this is the chief thing I came to ask you—to have fulfilled the conditions unconsciously, and may examine this packet when the time comes. What do you think?"

"I can form an opinion of only one side of the conditions," said Mrs. Cathcart, with the utmost innocence of manner, and the slyest purpose. "You must bear in mind that I don't know whether you are engaged, or have any notion of being engaged to marry any one."

"Of course I'm not! As if you would not know if I were! But ought I or ought I not to say anything to Miss

Monro about this letter? Trying to go back to the state of things at the time when it ought to have reached me, I feel Miss Monro would naturally have known nothing of its contents."

"The safest conclusion, I think," said Mrs. Cathcart, "is to abide by Mrs. Drummond's intention so far as you can. It has been frustrated to a certain extent by circumstances; but stop there. She meant her letter to be for yourself only; let it be so. I will not mention its existence, Janet will probably not refer again to its supposed loss, and, if Sir Wilfrid Esdaile asks any questions, you have only to say it is a letter of instructions."

"Esdaile will want to know whether it throws any light on Mrs. Drummond's motive for leaving Bevis to me; and I may safely say it does not. That mystery is deeper than ever, in fact. However, if you are clear that I had better say nothing to Miss Monro, I will not do so. I am going to dine at The Chantry, and felt I must see you first."

"I am quite clear about it. When did you come to Bevis?"

"Ah! You want to count up the three months! So do I; that old bureau has got a kind of Bluebeard's closet fascination for me. On the 10th of January I shall have been three months at Bevis. In three weeks I shall know all about it."

"Don't tantalise me," said Mrs. Cathcart, "as I am to know no more. Tell me about Sir Wilfrid. He is quite well, I hope."

"I don't know. I don't think he is; there is something wrong with him. His letter is very short; and there's nothing in it, except a refusal to join me in a little trip abroad, and a hint that he may possibly go out again to look after his plantation in Ceylon."

"What a restless being he must be!"

"He isn't generally. However, it's just as well he is not inclined for the Riviera, as I shouldn't think of leaving Bevis just now."

Captain Dunstan took his departure, and Mrs. Cathcart continued to sit by the fireside, while the rain fell and the day darkened, looking absently into the red coal caverns, as if she were reading fortunes there. Her thoughts took many forms, but they recurred more than once to this.

"Her motive a mystery! It is as clear as daylight. But why, loving Janet as she did, and distinctly not liking him, she should lay such an unmistakable plan to marry her to him, by throwing him in her way, and keeping him out of other people's, I cannot understand. Why did she not make the match in her lifetime, if she wanted to make it? Why is he so blind, so dull, to the meaning of it all?"

It seemed as though that hope which Mrs. Cathcart had been cherishing ought to have been strengthened by the strange disclosure; but somehow it was not. At the end of her reverie she had arrived at but two conclusions—one was, that Dunstan was not in love with Janet; the other was, that he would be certain to find some excuse for imparting to herself the secret to be disclosed on the 10th of January.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BLUEBEARD BUREAU.

JANET was much grieved by the explanation that had taken place between herself and Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, and his sudden departure from Bevis added to her discomfiture. She had been so absolutely innocent of any intention of misleading him, of any perception of his feelings towards her, that she could not hold herself to blame in the matter; but she was entirely given over to wonder and regret that she should have been so pleasing in the sight of a man of the world like Esdaile; that he should have come to love her so well as she could not doubt he did love her caused the wonder, the regret was for the pain from which she was unable to save him. She could only hope that it would not last long; the future might bring about the realisation of her desire for a friendship with

him, untroubled by the remembrance of this misplaced love. He had read her secret, he knew why it was that he must not try for a reversal of her sentence, and Janet shrank from that consciousness, not because she doubted his honour and loyalty, but because of the complication that knowledge brought into his own life. Esdaile's discovery had already deprived his friend of his company; if he were less high-spirited than Janet took him to be, it would deprive Dunstan of his friendship also, and thus become a double misery to her. She would have been thrown into dismay and confusion if Sir Wilfrid had again spoken to her; and yet she sometimes wished that she could see him, and make up her mind to ask him not to withdraw himself from Dunstan—if only on account of that which he had read in her face.

Janet possessed the excellent gift of sympathy, and yet in this case she was unable to estimate the pain which the mere sight of Dunstan inflicted on Esdaile; and when Dunstan complained that Sir Wilfrid had "thrown him over," and bemoaned his own disappointment, Janet felt herself guilty in that she had come between the friends whose mutual regard she had invested with loftiness, disinterestedness, and constancy such as made up her own ideal of friendship.

In the keen distress which Janet suffered, the dispersion of her illusion as to Julia's meaning, in the brief confidence that had marked their parting, had little share. Julia would divine the truth, most likely, on learning that Sir Wilfrid had left Bevis. Janet well knew how much pained she would be; and now, when she rightly understood Julia's meaning, she felt her friend would be unable to forgive her. Sir Wilfrid Esdaile was in Julia's eyes what he was in those of John Sandilands—a fortunate prince of fairy-tale times—and that he should ask and not have would be intolerable in Julia's sight. He had loved her from the first; he had told her so, and Julia had seen it! But Janet had not seen it; in her absorption of mind and heart, she had never thought that to others she seemed free and to be won.

What a world of cross purposes is this, thought Janet, and how hard it was that the love of a kind and manly heart, which would have made one for whom she was learning daily to care more and more profoundly happy, should be given to her who could not reward it.

With this fresh access of her sorrow came a resolution. Amabel must know the truth ; there should be no additional heart-burning in this unhappy matter, if some plain speaking on Janet's part, however painful to her, could avert it. The bright, odd, enthusiastic, hard-to-manage girl had become very dear to the friend who was so strangely unlike her, for other reasons than the almost worshipping affection with which Amabel regarded her. That it should fall to her own lot to cross Amabel's path Janet felt was also very hard ; if she had not been there Sir Wilfrid would most likely have been attracted by Amabel; and now her unlucky presence had brought trouble on two people who loved her.

Janet had not to wait long for an opportunity of telling Amabel what was in her mind ; her pale face and evident suffering brought quick questions from the impetuous girl.

"Something has happened to you, Janet ! What is it ? You have been crying."

Amabel was on her knees, with her arms round Janet in a moment, and Janet told her, as well as she could through her tears.

The girl's pretty face grew pale, but the clasp of her arms was tighter as she listened to Janet's broken words, and gathered from them that she dreaded their significance to her. She did not interrupt them once, but when they were ended she said :

"Poor Sir Wilfrid ! I knew there was trouble before him ; I saw it in his face from the first, and who knows better than I what a trouble this is ! Janet ! If I were a man and loved you in vain, I should kill myself."

She loosed her hold, and sank into her favourite attitude upon the floor, with her hands clasped on her knees, and her eyes fixed on Janet's face.

"And so my presentiment is out, and great harm has come to him."

"And to you, dearest, to you!" sobbed Janet.

"No," said Amabel, "not to me. I do care for him; I like him very much; I have the strangest feeling about him, as if I could see something that is terrible in his life, dimly, through a veil; I might have loved him well enough to have been the happiest woman in the world if he had loved me, or the most wretched if he had not, but that I have always known——"

"What, Amabel?"

"That he loved you, dear, and that there would be no chance for him. I don't say I am quite happy, I don't say I can quite like my life now that he is gone out of it—so far away, and for ever, for he will come no more to Bevis; but there is no disappointment; remember that: I never made any mistake about it, and I am not broken-hearted."

"And you forgive me?"

"Forgive you! Because he loves you! Yes, indeed, for how could he help it? Because you don't love him? Well, that's another and a harder matter; but neither can you help it. Don't fret about me, Janet; indeed, you need not, for I only grieve for him, and like him all the better that he loves you."

"You have the most generous nature in the world."

"Not I. I am only reasonable, in spite of my fancifulness, and I know some price must be paid for every blessing one has in this life. In sober seriousness you are my best blessing. And, Janet, I must tell you something; it is not only my presentiment about Sir Wilfrid that is fulfilled in this, it is a presentiment that I had about you also. It was the very first day I saw you; and you know, I, as well as poor Sir Wilfrid, fell in love with you on the spot; and it came over my mind, or my fancy, or my nerves, or whatever it is that receives those unaccountable impressions for which everybody except you scolds me or laughs at me, that either you would do me, or I should do you, some harm in days to

come. It passed away immediately just as a shiver passes over one's body and is gone; but it had been, and now it comes back to me. This is the harm you were to do me, dearest Janet; you see, it is not much."

"Ah, I do not think so. But, at all events, it is I who have done you, however unintentionally, harm. As for you, you will do me nothing but good all the days of my life."

"I hope so," said Amabel.

The two friends said much more to each other, but Amabel did not explain to Janet why it was that she had known from the first there was no chance for Sir Wilfrid.

After this they discussed the matter no farther, but they were even more drawn towards each other than before. To both, the inexorably bad weather was welcome; neither felt disposed to be subject just then to any scrutiny more discerning than that of Mrs. Ainslie, who recognised no ills except her own and that of Mr. Ainslie, who held that the climate of England was enough to account for anything that might happen to anybody. The weather, which kept the dwellers at The Chantry in, did not, however, keep Captain Dunstan out. He came thither nearly every day, grumbled with Mr. Ainslie, sang with Miss Monro, and made himself generally agreeable. So the year drew to its close.

Christmas had come and gone, with its pleasures of beneficence and its pains of memory, and the season, which she especially dreaded, had proved a happy time, on the whole, for Janet. The schools, and the almshouse women, the old people in the village, to which Bevis stood in the relation of the "great house," all the claimants of those bounties which are so much enhanced by personal solicitude and kindness, were saved from the neglect she had feared as a consequence of the death of Mrs. Drummond, by the active liberality of Captain Dunstan. Janet returned to Bury House a few days before Christmas, but not until she had, at Captain Dunstan's request, furnished him with a statement of all that Mrs. Drummond had been wont to do for the benefit of her neighbours at Christmas-time, and arranged

with Mrs. Manners for large benefactions of beef and pudding to the waifs and strays, towards whom Janet felt more kindness than the sternly-practical Vicar altogether approved.

A hard frost in the beginning of January succeeded the wet weather of the close of December, and the hunting with which Edward Dunstan had hoped to beguile the tedium of his stay at Bevis was impossible. That tedium did not, however, greatly beset him. He made plans for the disposal of himself after the date up to which he meant to remain, and he even began to think about London in the season with less reluctance than he would have believed possible a short time previously; but, apart from the curiosity with which he regarded the "Bluebeard bureau," as he called it, he was in no particular hurry for the interval to pass. His life was a pleasant one, and even his hurt pride and baffled passion could not altogether resist the stubbornness of facts. He had thoroughly qualified himself to break the seals of the packet in the Bluebeard bureau. The long delayed message from the dead had received all respect and attention from him. It had made him regard Janet Monro with additional curiosity and interest. He remembered Esdaile's saying about his own sense of the arbitrariness of fate in its respective dealings with himself and with John Sandilands, and he applied it to the difference between Janet's destiny and his own.

Captain Dunstan liked the society of women, and especially of those who were womanly He was not to be won by fashion, or even by personal attractions—to admire women who hunt, who "walk with the guns," look on at the slaughter of pigeons, pretend to understand horse-racing, talk the slang of the gaming saloons, and offer at all points a melancholy and contemptible spectacle to those who wish well to the human race. He had too much taste and humour to be moved to any feelings save disgust and ridicule by the deplorable freaks of modern young ladyhood in these and other objectionable directions, and he had found a few specimens of the prevailing mode, in the neighbourhood of

Bevis, irksome and oppressive to him. Amabel and Janet were both, in their far different ways, on their different levels essentially womanly, and much to Dunstan's taste. He did not ask himself whether, if he could have forgotten Laura and her treachery to him, he should have fallen in love with either of them, because he could not forget Laura, and her treachery had closed the book of love for him, and put it away from among his studies; he simply liked the two girls and sought their society with growing pleasure, especially that of Janet. Her thoroughness, her simplicity, her quiet courage, and the utter ignorance of the world which contrasted with the considerable knowledge she had acquired from books, invested her with a charm largely aided by her grace and beauty.

On the 10th of January, Captain Dunstan said to himself: "This is the day for the Bluebeard bureau. I will open the mysterious packet after breakfast." During that meal he reperused Mrs. Drummond's letter of instructions.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Cathcart, at the Vicarage, presiding over the Vicar's repast, was also thinking of the Bluebeard bureau, wondering at what time Dunstan would open the packet, and under what pretext he would reveal the secret of its contents to her.

Having waited until there should be little or no chance of his encountering an inquisitive housemaid in the admiral's corridor, or Mrs. Manners herself on a tour of inspection, Captain Dunstan proceeded to the unused rooms, in whose silent and speckless orderliness there was something oppressive. Unlocking, for the second time, the little door of the central space of the old bureau, he took out the parchment-covered packet, on which his own name was written by Mrs. Drummond's hand, carried it to the library and examined its contents.

These proved to be two documents; a narrow slip of paper was folded round each, and they were numbered respectively One and Two.

Number One was a more imposing document than the

other; even when folded, and before the labelled slip of paper was removed, it looked legal.

Number Two was simply a letter.

Captain Dunstan unfolded Number One, and smoothed it out upon the table before him. It needed only a glance to show him that he had under his eyes a will. With the usual preamble, in fair legal text, the document before him bequeathed to Janet Monro—who was named in terms of the warmest affection—the estate of Bevis, and all the other property of every kind of which the testatrix should die possessed. The will was duly signed and attested; and, with the first shock of an overwhelming surprise, there came over Dunstan a rush of desperate anger. He had then been mocked and fooled; made for three months to believe himself the owner of Bevis, to gratify Mrs. Drummond's fantastic spite, or her silly fancy! This thought was, however, but a lightning-flash; for the next instant his eye caught the date of the will. It was six months earlier than that of the document by which Mrs. Drummond had bequeathed Bevis to him. His own position was secure; her intention had changed, and at sufficient interval to do away with the idea of caprice: the sentiments she expressed in the letter which had been so long reaching him were her final sentiments; again he had wronged her.

He re-read the will. There was no mistake about it. Janet Monro, she of whom Mrs. Drummond had said that she regarded her as a daughter, she who was in a manner committed to his care, had been designated as the future owner of all that was now his by Mrs. Drummond, who had only her own free will to consult. She was the one person in all the world whom Mrs. Drummond loved; why had she changed her purpose towards her? It was a righteous purpose. Janet deserved from Mrs. Drummond all that she had to give; Janet would have made good use of it; her claim was a sounder one than his. So, in a moment of clear-seeing, did the truth come home to Edward Dunstan. Whence had come the change? Eagerly Dunstan turned

from the document, Number One, to the letter, Number Two. In this, no doubt, he would find the explanation.

The contents of Number Two were as follows :

"I address you, Edward, on the supposition that you will have acted in conformity with the communication from me that is to reach you with the notification of my death ; that you will have acquired the right to read these lines, and to become acquainted with a secret which must never be known to any one except yourself. I write on the supposition that you have resided three months at Bevis, that you have won the esteem and regard of Janet Monro, and that you neither are, nor are intending to place yourself, under any engagement to marry. These things being so, the case has arisen in which it is my wish to make you acquainted with the fact which the paper marked Number One will reveal to you, and you will now receive my last communication, which will have, when it reaches you, the additionally solemn sanction that the never-to-be-broken silence of death will have established between us.

"It is to Janet Monro—to her nobility of mind, her disinterestedness, her firmness, that you owe the possession of Bevis, and of all I have left to you. You see that it was to have been hers, and you will readily believe the alteration did not originate with me. Made aware of my intention, she earnestly entreated me to forego it ; and, failing in that, she assured me that it would be useless for me to attempt to put it in force, as nothing should induce her to accept the bequest of the property which she persisted in believing to be your inheritance by right. She succeeded. I yielded to her earnest prayer ; and, had she known that I had actually made the will, of which I spoke to her only as a thing intended to be done, I have no doubt she would have insisted on my letting her destroy it with her own hands, so that you might never come to the knowledge that it had existed.

"If you have gained the right to read these lines, you know by this time what manner of woman she is whom I

would have had to fill my place here, and that there is none which she would not adorn. No one, however, but yourself and myself can ever know all the truth about Janet. And now I am going to tell you why I have recorded this truth, in order that it may come to your knowledge after such a preparation as I have contrived. It is because, having done you all the good in my power in one way for Janet's sake, I would like to do you a far greater good for your own; and because, having renounced the dear hope that she would be here after me, in her own right, to keep up the remembrance of your uncle and myself, and the tradition of the past, the same hope in another form has stolen back into my old heart. I believe that you (as you will be when you read this) in Janet's confidence, her friend the witness of her good and blameless life, may win her for your wife, if you wish to do so; and that, if you do wish it, and do win her, the good I am now doing you is as far beyond what I have already done you as blessedness is beyond wealth. But, if this should not be so—if there is never to be a closer tie than that of friendship between you and Janet Monro, the thing I am doing can be no wrong; for it will make you know how noble is the heart in which you have secured a friend's place; and, for the rest, the fancy that is not to become fact, the hope that is not to be realised, will remain for ever a dead secret with the dead."

Mrs. Cathcart remained at home the whole of the day on the 10th of January, in the expectation of Captain Dunstan's calling at the Vicarage. He did not come; and the following day also passed without her seeing or hearing anything of him. It was not until the 12th that he presented himself, and she then perceived a curious change in his look and manner. He entered at once upon the subject of which they were both thinking, and with straightforward seriousness told Mrs. Cathcart that he found himself unable to reveal the nature of that disclosure which had been made to him.

"It has no present concern," he added, "for any one, and merely referred to a fact which Mrs. Drummond considered it necessary that I, as her heir, should know. The delay in my receiving her first letter turns out to be of no consequence, and the whole affair is of absolutely no interest or importance."

"You look as if you had done more thinking over this absolutely unimportant affair than you ever did in your life before," was Mrs. Cathcart's mental comment upon an explanation which explained nothing. She was, however, too well-bred to let her disappointment appear; and her smiling "How fortunate," and immediate easy introduction of some subject indefinitely removed from the topic under taboo, set her visitor at ease at once. In a few minutes she found that he was taking the lead in the conversation, and that its direction was towards Janet Monro. Her love for the place that had been her home for so long; her quiet tastes, her refinement, and cultivation; of these things Dunstan spoke in a way that seemed to provoke a question.

"Have you anything particular to say to me about Janet? Has anything happened?"

"Yes," replied Dunstan; "and I wished to tell you myself, because you are such a good friend to her and to me. I have asked her to come back to Bevis. I know you will be glad. I have asked her to be my wife, and she has consented."

"I never was more glad of anything in my life." And then, with striking inconsistency, Mrs. Cathcart burst into tears.

"And now for a bit of news" (so ran the closing paragraph of a letter from Edward Dunstan to Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, written that same night to reach him just before he was to leave England on an excursion, concerning which nothing was settled except that it was to be a distant one) "which will interest you, and surprise you too. I shall want the cats'-eyes after all, and Lady Esdaile shall have another set. You can guess what I mean. I did not think

of it when you were here: but I know it's the best thing I can do, and that you will think so. I have asked Miss Monro to marry me—I asked her yesterday; she has said 'Yes,' and she is most anxious you should know, and sends you all sorts of pleasant messages. Don't you think I'm right? Of course, there's no nonsense about this; that is over—well over, too, no doubt, and I hope the new leaf I have turned will have no follies writ large on it. Nothing settled, of course; but there is nothing particular for us to wait for, and so you must not be long away."

At the hour when Edward Dunstan was writing these lines, little thinking of the feelings of unavailing regret they would arouse in Esdaile, Janet was kneeling in the deep bay of the window of her room at Bury House, her folded arms rested upon the window-sill, her face was turned to the moonlight lying in silver bars upon the frost-bound earth, the joy and peace and thankfulness reflected in it were not contradicted by the tears which shone in her eyes. For Janet, in that quiet hour of unequalled happiness and hope, was not thinking of her lover only, or solely of the bliss that had come into her life, to glorify it for evermore; but also of the friend who was gone, and the interpretation of her bright, slow-falling tears was: "If she might but see me now! If she could only know how it is with me!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

A GRANTED PRAYER.

"Of course I am delighted. I have heartily wished that it might be so ever since I found out that Janet cared for him, and I saw that very soon; but, if you ask me to believe that the luck is on Janet's side, then I can't, and don't."

"What is luck, then, you impracticable person, if it is not in all that has happened to Janet? She cares for the one man in all the world who can restore her to her old home, and he asks her to marry him; the match is a splendid one for her, and a love-match as well. I must say

I think there never was a case of greater luck, or rather good fortune, for I don't like the word you are so fond of, and you will not find people taking your view of it, Amabel. The world in general will think Captain Dunstan has done a very romantic, and not a very wise thing, and that Janet is a favourite of destiny."

Mrs. Cathcart spoke a little irritably; for the truth was, she was as much puzzled as she was pleased by the unexpected realisation of her own wishes. She had never felt more certain of the correctness of any impression than that which Captain Dunstan left on her mind when he brought her Mrs. Drummond's letter to read. He was not in love with Janet, as she had previously hoped: then he comes and tells her that Janet is to be his wife, and she, though genuinely glad, feels that there is something wanting. This visit which she is going to make at Bury House does not afford her the unqualified pleasure that it ought to afford her, and she vents her own contradiction of feeling upon her companion, who has also a shady side to her sentiments on the subject.

Amabel turns her head sharply to look at her cousin, and jerks the mouths of Jack and Jill—the ponies are taking the two ladies over the frost-bound ground to Bury House at a cheery pace—and bursts out with an indignant remonstrance.

"I do believe you are going to be as worldly-minded as the rest of them!" she exclaimed; "and that you, who were the very person to convince me of the peerlessness of Janet, actually think the accident of Captain Dunstan's being the owner of Bevis and a lot of money puts him on a level with her. Of course it is very charming and delightful, so much so, that it is the greatest possible miracle it should have happened; but she's a hundred thousand times too good for him, even if there had not been the other woman."

"The other woman! What do you mean?"

"I don't know," said Amabel—here Jack and Jill got

another jerk—"at least, I do know; I mean the other woman whom he was in love with before he went out to India, and whom he could not marry, for some reason or other. I told you about her."

"You told me about your own idea that such a person existed; but you did not know it as a fact. And besides, what has that to do with the matter? If there really was such a person, nothing can be plainer than that Captain Dunstan has got over it. He would not be going to marry Janet if he had not."

"Of course not; but do you really not think Janet too good for him? Do you really think they will see things alike, and take life on the same level?"

Mrs. Cathcart did not reply. She did not distinctly hear—she was thinking. Presently she said, with great animation:

"Amabel, what if the other woman, as you call her, were Janet herself, after all? May you not be right, and my own notion be right also?"

"I never thought of such a thing," said Amabel, dubiously. "He had seen little of Janet before he went to India."

"That is no argument against it. Love at first sight is at least very common, if it is not the rule; and several things make me think I have hit upon the truth. Janet has captivated him now, why should she not have captivated him then, when he certainly could not have married her, when her position with his own relatives would have made it very unpleasant for her had she suspected or returned his feelings, when, in fact, the whole thing would have seemed to him an impossibility? But what a game of cross-purposes if this was the case!"

Here Mrs. Cathcart left off rather abruptly, for the sense of cross-purposes that struck her so strongly was derived from her own perception of the meaning that underlay Mrs. Drummond's letter to Dunstan and its occult purpose, and this, she remembered in time, must not be

divulged to her companion. Without imparting the knowledge of it, she could not make Amabel see from her point of view, so she wisely said no more, and was not annoyed when Amabel said she could not agree with her; she was sure Dunstan had not felt any interest in Janet beyond the merest good-will when they met at Bury House.

"It is not that I don't like him," said Amabel, "for indeed I do; there's perhaps nobody I know, except Janet, that I should not grudge him to. But I'm going to get over that, and to think of nothing but her views of the case."

They were met on their arrival at Bury House by the two old ladies, whose pleasure and importance under the novel circumstances were very great. Janet had just gone down to the gardener's house, where there was a sick child to be seen to; she would return presently—an intimation which sent Amabel off to find her there, and they were glad to have an opportunity of telling Mrs. Cathcart how nicely Captain Dunstan had behaved.

"Just as if our dear Janet had had two mothers, and we were them both," said Miss Susan; "he came to us and told us that she had done him the great honour of accepting him for her husband, and he hoped we should not object, but would feel satisfied that in placing her in his hands we might be sure of her happiness and welfare. So sensible, my dear madam, so unlike the young men one hears of. I assure you he might have been her brother, speaking to us for a third party, he was so quiet and respectful. What could we say, you know, except that we were delighted, and more than sensible of Janet's good fortune, as, indeed, we are, for it is quite wonderful."

"So is his," interposed Miss Sandilands. "No man in the world, let his position be what it may, could have any greater gift from Providence than such a wife as Janet, and this we told him. He seemed quite sensible of it, and said in the kindest way that he had an old acquaintance with her excellence."

"And his chief anxiety"—here Miss Susan struck in

again—"was that there should be very little delay about their marriage. I must say he is as impatient on that point as any of the lovers I have ever read of—I never had any experience of them myself," added Miss Susan, with a pleasant smile—"and he is as reasonable as he is impatient, because, as he says, the sooner Janet is back again in her old home, and everything is as Mrs. Drummond would have wished it to be, the better for every one."

"That is all as it ought to be; and what does Janet say?"

"Here she comes to answer for herself," said Miss Susan, as Janet and Amabel passed the window.

Mrs. Cathcart went out quickly, met Janet at the porch, and told her by a silent embrace how much she enjoyed her happy prospect. The older woman looked with astonished admiration at the girl when she had gone back into the drawing-room with her, and stood in the midst of the group of friends, the very picture of happiness and hope. The steady light in her serene, gray eyes, the lovely colour on her cheek, the sensitive smile that hovered about her lips, were all like herself, indeed, but like herself intensified. She said a few words of her gratitude for all their kindness, but they were not very distinctly uttered.

"My kindness, Janet," said Mrs. Cathcart, "has a strong dash of the benevolence that begins at home in it. I am so rejoiced to think of you at Bevis that I cannot express my feelings. And the Vicar charges me to convey his sentiments also."

"I am so glad Mr. Cathcart does not—that he is not—dear Mrs. Cathcart, it is all so much too good for me; you are all so much too kind to me."

The motherless girl burst into a passion of happy tears, which was allowed to exhaust itself by the wise management of Mrs. Cathcart, who left her to Amabel, while she talked business with the Misses Sandilands.

Captain Dunstan, it appeared, had pleaded successfully with Janet for a short engagement. The marriage was to

take place in six weeks, and the first peep of the world, beyond a circuit of twenty miles, which Janet had had for so long as she could remember, was to be her wedding trip. The wedding was to be as quiet as possible, and the only person to be invited—except Amabel, Mrs. Cathcart, and one friend of Dunstan's—was to be Julia Carmichael.

The old ladies and Mrs. Cathcart formed one group, Janet and Amabel formed another, and these practical matters were discussed in the first; but the girls heard most of what was said by their elders, and when Miss Susan told Mrs. Cathcart that Captain Dunstan's most particular wish was that Sir Wilfrid Esdaile should be with him on the occasion, Janet's hand pressed Amabel's nervously, and received a strong pressure in return.

"He will not come," whispered Amabel.

"No, I am sure he will not, and I don't know what to do. Ought I to tell—him, or not?"

"I don't know. I think he will tell him when he refuses to come; he will if he's the man I take him to be, and then he will live it down."

It distressed Janet that even so much allusion as this to the fact that she was loved and sought after by another was necessary. She would have liked to feel that the words in which he had asked her for that heart which had been his ever since she had known that love existed among the pains, and might be the one sole joy of life, its savour, its prize, its help, and its reward, were the only words with such a meaning that had ever reached her ears. But that it could not be so, was the one particle of alloy in the wealth of her great blessedness.

Captain Dunstan was to arrive at Bury House that evening, the old ladies told Mrs. Cathcart; and he talked of having to go to London in a few days to make some necessary arrangements. This was rather a pity, they thought, as the engagement was to be so short, for they had several old-fashioned notions on the subject of courtship, and held that the time it lasted was the brightest time of a girl's

life, that in which she enjoyed most of the happy and innocent triumphs of girlhood. It seemed to be the modern notion to cut all this beautiful sweethearting-time as short as possible ; so they could only suppose people knew best what suited themselves.

"Of course, it's very different when there's a beautiful home ready to bring a bride to, and there's nothing to be thought of in the way of furniture, and servants, and how things are to be done for the best. We know there's no comparison at all between Janet's case and our John's ; but still we could wish Captain Dunstan were not in quite such a hurry."

"And I could not forgive him if he granted Janet a single day's extension of leave, for I want her back at Bevis quite desperately," gaily answered Mrs. Cathcart ; and then, Janet having recovered her composure, she turned to her, and the friends conversed long and earnestly. Mrs. Cathcart had not seen Dunstan since he had brought her the good news, but this was by no means surprising : he was, of course, very much occupied, and at Bury House daily.

"Did you ever see such a picture of happiness in your life ?" Amabel asked Mrs. Cathcart, when they were on their way home.

"I really do not think I ever did. And what a blessing it is to think that it is such well-founded happiness, with everything in his character and position and circumstances to make it lasting."

"Except her innocence of life and the world's ways, and her wonderfully high ideas, and her belief not only that her geese are swans, for she thinks that of *us*, you know—yes—of you and me, she holds our plumes to be dazzling and our forms of unequalled grace—but that this particular goose—Captain Dunstan, I mean—is a swan of more than earthly swannishness, a phœnix among swans. I wish she did not worship him quite so devoutly."

"Nonsense, Amabel ; if Janet did not worship, as you call it, the man she loves, she would not love him at all,

it's in her nature ; anything else wouldn't be Janet ; and besides, when was any man the worse of being overrated by his wife, or any woman the worse of overrating her husband ? The risk and the evil are all the other way, it seems to me."

"When they get found out, you mean," said Amabel, "when the joss-sticks are pulled up, and the incense is put away with the pepper and the pickles."

They were right ; Janet did look the picture of happiness, and she felt the reality. The variety of her feelings, the wonder, the pride, the humility, the deep thankfulness, the new horizon of life, the boundless gratitude and devotion, the many memories of the past with the sting taken out of them all, the sense of a great peace ; all these absorbed her when her lover was not with her, and formed, when he was, an accompaniment as of entrancing music to the unspeakable delight of his presence.

She looked back into her short life no farther than to the time when she had seen him first and loved him—it might have been with her fancy, but she took it for her heart—that summer-time when he came to Bevis, and lighted up the staid and quiet house, where she lived so sombre though so happy a life, like a sunbeam. He had been only a couple of weeks at Bevis, and she knew vaguely that the admiral and he did not get on together very well ; but what had that to do with her ? She knew, afterwards, that Mrs. Drummond did not like him ; but Mrs. Drummond never alleged that there was anything in it except a matter of taste, and what had *that* to do with her ? All the conditions, circumstances, influences, cohered to make of what might have been at first but a passing fancy, the one great truth, the central meaning of Janet's life. On three occasions only, with long intervals between, and for a short period, she had been in his society ; and, while he had hardly taken any real heed of her, the courtesy of his winning manner had prevented her feeling that. It was impossible that any woman could have been slighted or

neglected where Edward Dunstan was; she was "the young lady of the house" to him, though to others she might be only "Mrs. Drummond's companion;" and, while his own heart and mind were full of Laura Chumleigh, and of the contending hopes and fears of his position with his uncle, he won the heart of the young girl who had no one with whom to compare him. When the time came at which Janet knew that Mrs. Drummond had determined to bequeath to her the estate which she had never thought of otherwise than as Dunstan's, the shock of terror and grief which the knowledge caused her revealed to her loving friend the secret she had not herself discovered. That there was anything noble, anything generous in her immediate renunciation of the intended bequest, never crossed Janet's mind for a moment.

Had the admiral's nephew been nothing to her, instead of being all her world, she would have done just the same. But the sweetness of the secret sense that she had so done this thing that he should never know there had been any thought of another but himself in the admiral's place, was exquisite indeed. If the will had been read after Mrs. Drummond's death. and she had either been obliged to renounce the legacy or, perhaps, accept it and then make it over to him—for she did not know whether her renunciation would have handed it over to the admiral's nephew—it would have been so miserable, so distressing. There might have been some hurt pride on his part; perhaps, horrible thought ' he might not have been able to forgive her for the mortification, in the infliction of which she would have been so guiltless; he might have regarded her as in some sort his enemy

She allowed herself to dwell in imagination upon this possibility, for the sake of the delightful certainty and safety which the manner of her discovery and defeat of Mrs. Drummond's cruel kindness had brought to her. This had sustained her under the keen grief of parting with the place and the innumerable objects that had been so dear to

her ; this had been present with her while she carried out all Mrs. Drummond's directions, and waited for a communication from Dunstan which never came.

Again, had Mrs. Drummond's temporary intention ever found expression, she would have feared the possibility of his gratitude—feared that it might have occurred to him as possible that she could have accepted such a gift, and therefore that it might have also occurred to him as possible to feel grateful, obliged, and under some sort of compliment to her. With the repugnance of a nature in which every feeling was thorough, absolute, complete in all its consequences, Janet shrank from such an idea ; for she loved him with a strength and depth that could have brooked nothing from him but love.

Nothing but love ! And it had come ! All was changed ; the earth was suddenly turned into heaven—all the future was irradiated with joy. If Janet gave a thought to her past fancies and fears at all, it was only because they crossed her memory when she was busy with the thought of how strange a fulfilment of the intention which she had frustrated had been brought about by destiny. She had never known her parents ; but it seemed to her that the veil was rent that hid them from her in the land of light, and that they knew she was happy, and were happy with her. The music that her heart made found utterance in her voice ; the perfect trust and love which filled that heart touched her face with a rich and a roseate beauty.

Captain Dunstan's demeanour in the character of an accepted suitor was very graceful, and the brief period of their engagement passed over without any untoward incidents to mar its pleasantness. This pair of lovers never quarrelled, no little jealousies or distrusts arose between them ; one lived in a dream which drew its beautiful illusion from her own pure, passionate, absolutely-surrendered heart ; the other lived in a pleasant-enough sort of reality, seeing that he had laid by dreams and illusions, and had a pleasant consciousness that he had done the right thing. After all,

he must have married and settled at some time, and one time was just as good as another, when none could make any real difference.

It might have been another matter if he had gone up to town for the season, and once more met Laura; in that case it would not have been so easy by any means. And Janet was nice—charming, indeed, in her way, handsome, clever, with all her ignorance, which her intelligence would speedily remove, and which was, at all events, infinitely better than the detestable knowingness of most girls, refined, if unlike other people, and then so exquisitely good. He would not have thought of her as a wife but for the peculiar circumstances; but then he would not have thought of any one as a wife, not for a long time, at least. In her calm, profound way, Dunstan thought she certainly loved him, and she had behaved splendidly; he was almost sorry that he must never tell her that he knew what she had done; but, even if he were not bound, there was something about her which made him sure that it would not do—well, she should never have any reason to regret her self-sacrifice, and it was most fortunate she was of the quiet-minded sort. *Quand on n'a pas ce qu'on aime, il faut aimer ce qu'on a*—or, if not love, then like—the one does as well as the other in the end.

He wondered what Laura would think—Laura, who would not wait for him, when nobody could have known that he had no chance of Bevis, who would not stand a little bullying from her mother for his sake; she had married Thornton as much to get away from Lady Rosa as for his wealth—if she knew that there was a girl, quite without friends or position, who had renounced a fortune for love of him, and done it so that it should not be known to him? Would the contrast with her own conduct humiliate Laura in her own sight? At all events, Laura would soon learn that he was not breaking his heart about her any longer. Julia Carmichael was sure to tell her, whether with or without the consciousness that the information would have any

special interest, and equally sure to add that Janet was handsome. No one in the world, least of all Laura, would ever dream of any motive except love in his marriage. And so Mrs. Drummond would have her way, after all; the posthumous match-making would succeed. Supposing Laura had kept her promise, that will would have gone unread into the fire, and Janet's renunciation would never have been known to him, and Janet herself, what would have become of her? Would she have gone on living, or rather vegetating, at Bury House with her old friends, or would she, too, have adopted the frank philosophy of the maxim he had just remembered, and liked somebody else?

Captain Dunstan was thinking desultorily on these lines, when the answer to his letter to Sir Wilfrid Esdaile reached him. It bore a Spanish post-mark.

"Spain, eh!" said Dunstan. "That accounts for the delay."

He read the letter, and his face fell; Sir Wilfrid Esdaile at least justified Amabel's opinion of him. Very frankly and simply he told Dunstan why it was that, while wishing him every happiness, he could not be present at his wedding. "I know Miss Monro will not tell you," he added; "and as no estrangement shall come between us if I can help it, I tell you myself, I would rather not meet her again until she is your wife. *You* know how one gets over a thing of this kind, and of course it is easier where one never had a chance of winning; but I never mean to get over my belief that you are the luckiest fellow in the world, and that there's nobody in it to compare with Miss Monro."

"Esdaile will not come to our wedding," said Dunstan that evening to Janet, "and he tells me why. I must have been very stupid not to see it; it is plain enough now."

"I hope," she answered, trembling and blushing, "I shall not cost you your friend. It never occurred to me for one moment until he spoke to me."

"Ah, but you have no vanity. I remember now he was never easy unless he was coming here or to The

Chantry. We shall not lose him; he's the best fellow in the world. Here's the song."

Janet sang, and Dunstan turned the pages, and no more was said, but Dunstan's memory was busy with those days at Southampton, when Esdaile had thought him so unreasonable, and he had thought Esdaile so insensible. On Janet's white arm was the bracelet, with the softly, shiftily-gleaming cats'-eyes; the bracelet he had meant for Laura, and then for Esdaile's wife. Janet looked at it, and touched it now and then lovingly, almost reverently; it was his first gift.

"I never saw jewels of this kind before," said Janet, when she had finished her song. "Tell me about them."

He told her, and the old time when he had bought them at Ceylon seemed very far past.

The next day he went to London, and between that time and the date appointed for the marriage only one vexatious circumstance occurred.

The individual who troubled the even current of events was Colonel Chumleigh. He got an attack of gout, and Lady Rosa resented his conduct so severely that Julia felt it impossible to leave her uncle to the tender mercies of his indignant wife; so she sent only good wishes and a marriage gift to Janet, who could not help suspecting that Julia was angry with her.

On a bright cold day, at the end of February, the quiet wedding took place; and, as the Vicar joined the hands of the bride and bridegroom, the wintry sun shone out, and a streak of its light touched the marble tablet on the wall of the church which was inscribed with Mrs. Drummond's name. Janet's glance followed the ray, and her heart went with it in a great thrill of love and gratitude for the past, and hope, unsullied and boundless, for the future.

Captain and Mrs. Dunstan were to begin their journey from Bury House; but it was at the Vicarage, whither the little party had adjourned from the church to luncheon, that Amabel took leave of Janet.

"Do you remember what you promised me?" she said, eagerly, holding Janet back yet another minute, while Dunstan and the Vicar stood patiently by the carriage door, "that, come what would, nothing should ever part you and me."

"Of course I remember, and now, when I come back, we shall be more together than ever."

"Did you ever see a lovelier bride?" asked Mrs. Cathcart of the Vicar, as she and Amabel drew their chairs up to the fire, and he was preparing to leave them to their tea and talk.

"Only once," said the Vicar. His wife smiled and shook her head at him.

"And," he continued, "I never saw, even once, so perfectly self-possessed a bridegroom. A handsome and a happy pair."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"TOM ESDAILE'S BOY."

It was a relief to Sir Wilfrid Esdaile to receive the letter in which Edward Dunstan told him that he was going to marry Janet. There was nothing heroic about the young man, who had hitherto had so much of his own way in life, and had not on the whole made a bad use of it; but he had generosity and large-heartedness which made him glad that the girl who might have made so different a man of him, had she accepted him, was not to have her life embittered by disappointment. And he had feared at first that it was to be so. With the revelation of the truth there had come—together with the bitter knowledge that it was his own familiar friend who had involuntarily won the prize which, to Sir Wilfrid, seemed the one prize in life worth winning—compassion and fear for Janet herself. He had no notion that Janet had made an impression upon Dunstan sufficiently strong to lead to the result which had taken place. He and his friend had dropped the subject of

Mrs. Thornton by common tacit consent, and Esdaile did not know whether Dunstan had got over that trouble; but whether he had or not, there was nothing to indicate that one so utterly different had supplanted Laura. Esdaile did not think Dunstan more likely to be constant to a hopeless passion than any other man—always excepting himself, whom a little while ago he would have suspected of such a sentiment less than anybody—but his winning and attentive ways, which might have looked to a stranger like the result of captivation, were, as Esdaile knew, habitual to Dunstan, and just as much addressed to Miss Sandilands, or to Julia Carmichael, as to Janet.

He was sincerely and unaffectedly sorry, and he murmured at the prevalence of cross-purposes in human affairs, and the vanity of all things. Here was Janet, a peerless woman, throwing away her love—which would have made him (Esdaile) the happiest man alive, and "kept him straight"—upon Dunstan, who was in love with another woman, and had been thrown over by her very lightly, to say the least of it.

Esdaile did not hate his friend because Janet loved him, although he frankly envied him; and, when the news reached him, he was surprised beyond measure. Dunstan's cure was then complete, and it had been strangely rapid. It had been wrought under his own eyes, simultaneously, indeed, with the mending of his own broken bones, and he had never suspected it! Well; so be it. Dunstan was a good fellow, but he did not deserve this last best good that fate had sent him; the man who had been enslaved by one so different from Janet, could not give Janet such a love as only could make her happy Esdaile believed himself to be a common-place sort of man; until he met Janet he had never particularly wished to be other and better than he was; but at least he could appreciate her justly and sympathise with her truly—he who had never been in love with any one except herself, who had no

memories of false and fickle fine-ladyism to blunt his perception of her pure truth and fervent goodness, and to take the edge off his taste for these qualities.

Dunstan was going to marry Janet, and he could write of it so coolly, saying that all follies—meaning love of the kind which he had lavished vainly on Laura Chumleigh—were over for him! Nothing that he had ever had to do in his life cost him so much pain as writing to Dunstan, whose letter reached him before he left England, and travelled with him to the town on the Spanish frontier, from whence he had despatched his answer.

Would Sir Wilfrid have been sufficiently magnanimous to be glad, had he known that it was to his hand Janet owed the little push that had set the wheel of fortune turning for her? When he found among his papers a slim black-bordered envelope, addressed, in a hand which he had never seen, to Captain Edward Dunstan, and sent it on to its proper destination, he had been pleased at being able to remove a cause of perplexity from his friend and from Janet; but he thought no more of it, and he never learned that the woman he loved, and "grudged sair" to Dunstan, owed the fulfilment of her heart's desire to this trifling circumstance.

Then there fell on Esdaile discontent and weariness of life, and the evils of his early training began to tell on him. If he had not hitherto regarded life from the Utopian point of view, he had believed it a very pleasant sort of thing, generally, and he had not troubled himself to contemplate its aspects for persons less fortunate than himself. He was good-natured, easy to move to an untroublesome kind of charitableness, and, as he had proved in the case of John Sandilands, trusty in friendship; but he was not either by nature or education a man to bear trouble, and especially disappointment, well, that is to say, with profit. Out of the eater comes not forth meat, nor out of the bitter sweetness, except to the disciplined mind and will; these he had not,

and so Sir Wilfrid Esdaile took it ill that his sky had clouded over, and sulked with fortune, in whose smiles he had hitherto lived, because her face was stern.

The first time a man learns, as a hard fact, that he cannot have what he wants, the lesson is bound to be severe, and the more so in proportion as it has been long delayed, and is in striking contrast with previous experiences. Sir Wilfrid was an unruly pupil in the school of contradiction, impatient of pain and resentful. Janet's kindly message vexed him; he had believed her wider-minded, capable of comprehending feelings which she had never experienced; he thought she would have some idea of what the hopeless loss of her meant to him. The harmless words in Dunstan's letter, which she could hardly have avoided allowing him to write, unless she had made the avowal which it was for Esdaile himself to make or to leave unmade, hurt him. She was happy, and what did it matter to her? Thus did the man who loved Janet with a love which might have elevated his whole character, misjudge her, and, taking his punishment ill, harden himself. Not that the "Amen" to "God bless her" stuck in his throat; but that he could not be reconciled with his enemy—disappointment. Restlessness—our modern fashion of parrying trouble—seized upon him, and the notion of returning to Ceylon, which he had mentioned to Dunstan because he found it difficult to account for himself, began to assume the form of a serious purpose.

He would stay awhile with John, and then go on to India, do the grand tour of the country, try whether any amusement was to be got out of the big game, and perhaps make his way to some of those places, in which everything is so strange that it seems impossible to go on thinking the old thoughts and to be haunted in them by the old scenes. He fell in with a few people whom he knew on his way through the south of France, and went on with them into Spain, caring little whither he went or what he looked at, but yielding to the restlessness of an idle man. He sometimes wished that his life were not all leisure, that it had in

it some certain and enforced occupation, since pleasure, hitherto his business, had become of a sudden so hideously vapid that he asked himself whether it was not the most stupendous of bores. He even thought that he would not dislike to manage that coffee plantation of his, if only it were not his own. The state of mind into which Sir Wilfrid Esdaile was falling would have been observed with regret by any one who cared for him. Unfortunately, no one who cared for him was near; circumstances had for some time made his association with Captain Dunstan his closest tie, and this was now broken. Under the influence of unhappiness, and his revolt against it, the "wildness" which had gained for Sir Wilfrid's father a worse reputation than he deserved, began to develop itself in "Tom Esdaile's boy," as Mr. Gilchrist had called him. Sir Wilfrid drifted about a good deal, and when the announcement of Dunstan's marriage reached him, he drifted back from Spain with the new acquaintances who had added themselves to the old ones in whose company he had crossed the frontier, and found himself, without much premeditation, and in a devil-may-care frame of mind, in the midst of the gambling world of Nice and Monaco.

In former days Sir Wilfrid Esdaile had not cared for play; he had not felt the craving for any fierce excitement, but had been content with the less harmful diversions of sport and society. He had none of the vulgar love of mere gain that frequently underlies a passion for gambling, which is, by an odd perversion, held less odious when it is free from a sentiment which, though mean, is at least reasonable, and he was not a sufficiently rich man to lose with impunity and indifference; therefore he had kept clear of temptation. "Fatal Zero" had not allured him, while he was still as when we saw him first,

A youth light-hearted and content;

but he was drawn towards it, when in the fever of his disappointment he turned from milder pursuits.

He told himself that he would go out to Ceylon by-and-

by, when Rattray, St. John, Le Mesurier, and the others should have gone back to London; but for the present he would stay here, and do as the others did, who did not want to forget how much better and better off they might have been but for the cross-grained dealings of fate. And so the early spring found Sir Wilfrid Esdaile among the motley company who thronged by times the Promenade des Anglais or the beautiful gardens which border the coast of Nice, and frequenters of the paradisaical pandemonium of Monte Carlo.

He had not heard from Dunstan, but he knew from Julia that the newly-married pair were in Paris, and that they were to be in London after Easter. What a wonderland must the bright city be to Janet, he thought, remembering the eagerness with which she had questioned him about Paris, while showing him that its history and associations were more familiar to her than to himself. Julia said little of Janet, and that little in a measured way, and Sir Wilfrid wondered whether she had found out his secret. At least, it was evident Julia did not rejoice in Janet's marriage. Sir Wilfrid wondered what she had said to John Sandilands about it, and what that steady-going and obstinate young Scotchman thought of the celerity of Dunstan's recovery from his disconsolate state. How well he remembered the vague trifling way in which they had discussed the unnamed young lady of Dunstan's love, and recalled the first casual mention of Miss Monro.

A bright day at the end of March, the sort of day which makes sojourners in a land of sunshine cultivate their own sense of well-being by speculating upon what their friends in England are suffering from the weather, had tempted a number of the more confirmed invalids, whose presence lends a touch of sadness to the scene in so many places on the Riviera, into the pure and sparkling air. The Castle Hill was more than usually attractive, with its palms and cypresses flung against a sky of the clearest blue, and the far-spreading prospect over the Bay of the Angels was

steeped in sunshine. Sir Wilfrid Esdaile and two of his friends had accompanied some new arrivals to the Castle Hill, and Sir Wilfrid was pointing out the various features of a view which has not many rivals, when he suddenly stopped short, arrested by the sight of two ladies who were advancing slowly in the direction of the platform.

The taller and younger of the two leaned on the arm of the shorter and older, and, although walking with manifest fatigue, she had something of eagerness in her gait and expression. Her slightly parted lips seemed to drink the pure delicious air as she came slowly on, with a graceful walk, and distinguished carriage, although no one could look at her and fail to see that for her the beckoning hand was raised. Her face was very fair, with such harmony of line and feature that its beauty was still striking though all the bloom had vanished from it, with deep dark gray eyes, and very rich fair hair, which lay in waved masses above her broad smooth brow, defined by the narrow rim of white under her close black bonnet. Her plain dress, the deep mourning of a widow, was in the French style, except for the narrow cap-rim. The older lady was a cheery-looking person of perhaps five-and-thirty, rather stout, with very black eyes, a high colour, and an expression of vigilant kindness which rendered a plain face singularly attractive. Her mere manner of supporting the delicate hand and wrist resting on her substantial arm told of intelligent care. Her attire was of a thoroughly English type and overdone in point of colour. It was singular that the sight of these unobtrusive persons, who took no notice of them, seemed to affect Sir Wilfrid Esdaile and the lady to whom he was speaking, simultaneously, and with equal force, for they both started and stared. Sir Wilfrid, however, recovered himself in an instant with a muttered, "No; it cannot be!" but the lady said:

"Surely, surely, that is Janet Monro;" then, unconscious of the astonishment which her words awakened in Sir Wilfrid, she walked rapidly away from him, and ap-

proached the tall young lady in deep mourning with outstretched hand and the words: "Dear Mrs. Monro, I am equally surprised and delighted to meet you here!"

A flush, which instantly faded, passed over Mrs. Monro's face, strengthening the likeness that had struck Sir Wilfrid, and a sweet smile, nearly as evanescent, marked her recognition of the person who addressed her.

"And I little expected to see you, Mrs. Thornton."

The stout lady fell back a step, as Mrs. Monro removed the hand which had lain on her arm, that it might clasp that of Laura, and looked with interest at the brilliant face and the beautiful dress of the dazzling little person—little beside the tall, bending figure of Mrs. Monro—who glanced at her in return with lively curiosity.

"My friend, Miss Wells," said Mrs. Monro; and then Laura shook hands with Miss Wells, and called to Sir Wilfrid Esdaile to come and be introduced to Mrs. Monro; and the other gentleman of Mrs. Thornton's party, who had moved on to another point of view before she observed Mrs. Monro, returned. Mr. Thornton was as well pleased as his wife to meet the young widow in whom they had felt so strong an interest, the friend and neighbour of the old lady at the Stone House, far away in bleak Scotland. But he was quick to see the change in the fair face and the slight figure, and he inquired about Mrs. Monro's health with real solicitude.

The party were soon walking down the slope to their respective carriages, and Laura was trying hard to persuade Mrs. Monro that nothing would be so good for her as a cruise in their yacht. The *Firefly*, it appeared, was in the harbour, and her owners had come to Nice only the day before. Laura had already met several persons of her acquaintance, but meeting Mrs. Monro was quite too delightful. She had so much to say and to hear. Where was Mrs. Monro staying? their hotel was on the Promenade; how delightful it would be if it proved to be Mrs. Monro's hotel also!

This crowning satisfaction was not reserved for Laura. Mrs. Monro was living in the old town, "to be with Miss Wells," she said briefly in explanation; and she was afraid it would be too much for her to visit Mrs. Thornton that day; the expedition to the Castle Hill had been a great undertaking for her. It was arranged that Laura should call upon her early on the following day, and the little party separated. Only a few sentences had been exchanged between Mrs. Monro and Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, but she had told him that she had heard much of him from her sister-in-law, Mrs. Dunstan. As Janet's new name was pronounced for the first time in his hearing, Sir Wilfrid glanced at Mrs. Thornton, thinking it must sound strangely to her too, but she did not seem to have heard it.

"You remember," wrote Mrs. Thornton to Julia Carmichael, a week afterwards, "Mrs. Monro, the young widow whom I met in Scotland just after my marriage; she is here, and I fear she is in very bad health. I was near making such a blunder that I must tell you about it. We met Mrs. Monro at the show place here, called the Castle Hill, and there was an odd, brisk, stout, kind-looking person with her, whom I took for a sort of superior maid, with a talent for the care of invalids, but Mrs. Monro introduced her as her friend, Miss Wells. It turns out that Miss Wells is a 'character.' She has a large fortune, and spends it among the poor English at all sorts of foreign places. She lives a great deal at Nice, in the unfashionable quarter, in a roomy old hotel, because her mother and sister—the only people she had belonging to her—died here, and are buried in that dreadfully pretty, melancholy cemetery. If there are any solitary and uncared-for people among the poor creatures who come here in numbers for a little prolongation of life, Miss Wells finds them out, looks after them and cheers them up. She is doing all these good things for Mrs. Monro, who is hopelessly ill, Mr. Thornton thinks; but I fancy she will get better in this delightful place.

"We have also met your hero, Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, and

renewed our acquaintance with him. He is very nice, but I wish he were not so fond of play, and so ready to make friends of people he does not know much about. He is not in a good set—Mr. Thornton has already been told—if, indeed, there is a good set here—among the playing people, I mean. One does see such dreadful-looking men, like the creatures with whom Becky Sharpe went to the ball where the Marquis of Steyne and his scar met her, and women more dreadful still, if possible. Sir Wilfrid gets on better with Mr. Thornton than with me; he is exceedingly polite and all that, but I don't think he likes me a bit. I should not have taken him for the sort of person you described—I mean merely in his ways; he seems restless and easily bored, and not at all decided about what he is going to do. Mr. Thornton and he have been talking this morning about 'climbing' in the autumn, and Sir Wilfrid seems quite bitten with the idea, although he is not an Alpine man. I wish they could set about it now, for it would be much better for him than the 'tapis vert,' and the people who surround it, and he has been so good to you, I cannot but like him.

"We had a talk about you and your plans yesterday; he vows he will bring John Sandilands back from Ceylon, and that there must be no more delay. He spoke with so much dislike of long engagements, and the slips between cup and lip in human affairs, that I have a notion of my own about him. Mrs. Monro, whom I see every day, is full of her sister-in-law's marriage, and I have caught Sir Wilfrid looking at me once or twice when she has been asking him questions, very much as if Captain Dunstan had not kept his own counsel about the past. If I am right that would account for his not being very cordially disposed towards me, considering that he and Sir Wilfrid are such friends; and yet what nonsense, now that he has got over it, and is married, like myself. It was a little odd, don't you think, that marriage? For, after all, she was nobody, and he could hardly have been very violently in love. Men are never very good at descriptions of people, and Sir Wilfrid

is no better than the rest; he is vague about Mrs. Dunstan, but says she is wonderfully like Mrs. Monro.

"Our plans are not settled; but I think we shall be here for another fortnight, and then go to Paris, and on to London after a little time there. The house at Prince's Gate is nearly ready; we get glowing accounts of it, but of course I shall put the finishing touches to it myself. And remember, dearest Julia, you must be there when we arrive. I wonder whether the Dunstans will be in town this season—Sir Wilfrid says he does not think they have a house—at any rate, as I shall be keeping quiet, I shall not be likely to see them."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LAURA.

It was natural that Sir Wilfrid Esdaile should observe Mrs. Thornton more closely than if he had met her again as merely one of the innumerable persons whom one sees everywhere for awhile, and then ceases to see. He would have studied her in any case as the woman who had made so strong an impression on Dunstan, but later events lent her an additional interest. She was the distant and indirect cause of the misfortune that had taken the good out of his own life, and, as he was aware, when he would allow himself to listen to the warning, out of himself also. If she had but waited for Dunstan, if she had had just enough constancy, and sufficient of the spirit of the gambler, who always believes in a coming turn of the luck, his own luck would not have been so dead against him in the one great venture of his life. And how admirably Laura and Dunstan would have suited each other! With the strongly contrasted image of Janet in his mind's eye, he felt this at every turn; and found it more than ever difficult to account for Dunstan's marriage. Could he really have come to care for Janet? Had he married her for some inexplicable motive, without caring for her?

Esdaile admired Laura; who could avoid admiring the brilliant and animated young woman on whom life was smiling, and who smiled back responsively at life? She was handsomer than before her marriage; and her vivacity, her readiness to please and be pleased, her unflagging spirits, rendered her charming to everybody. There was no more popular person among the English visitors to Nice that season than the beautiful Mrs. Thornton. Was she absolutely heartless, Sir Wilfrid wondered; did she take everything so lightly as she seemed to do; or had the marriage, in which her heart was not, unless Dunstan had egregiously deceived himself from the first, turned out a success after all?

The season was fine; even the habitual grumblers, who were given to talk of the "treachery" of the climate, were satisfied for once; and Laura enjoyed her sojourn with thoroughness which had not yet yielded to the habit of wealth, and the unlimited power of indulging her fancies. Prominent among the latter was her liking for Mrs. Monro; the regard with which the young widow had inspired her in Scotland, and which had been due in part to the boredom that had beset her in the unrelieved society of her husband and his aunt, revived on this their second meeting, and Laura derived great pleasure from the power of being useful to her friend.

"I always longed to have her with us," she said to Miss Wells, "away from that horrid cold place, and those dull skies and dismal mists! and you see how right I was; she is ever so much better. If she had only been with us at Naples and Palermo all the winter, she would be quite well by this time. Just look at her colour, and she does not cough once for every ten times she did ten days ago."

Laura had the cheerful disbelief in serious illness, so long as the invalid can be up and about, that belongs to persons who enjoy perfect health, and she persisted in considering Mrs. Monro merely "delicate." And, indeed, there were hopeful symptoms about her now, and she seemed to be reprieved. She took long drives with Laura, and even

went for a short cruise in the yacht; on this occasion Sir Wilfrid Esdaile was on board the *Firefly*, and so attentive was he to Mrs. Monro and her odd-looking friend that Miss Wells "quite took to him," as she expressed it, and they were all doubly sorry about the rumours that reached them concerning his wildness. But the cruise, though the waves were like molten sapphires and the sky was like a dome of turquoise, was too much for Mrs. Monro. She was unable to go out for some days afterwards, so that Laura had to come to her, and this she did very willingly.

The acquaintance of Miss Wells with Nice, and the associations, so dear in spite of all their pain, that bound her to the place, were of old date, before the modern extension and grandeur of the city; and she adhered to the old places and ways. It was a roomy and comfortable, not a bright or luxurious abode in which Miss Wells had established her head-quarters for several years; the modern magnificence of the hotels affected by the Russian, American, and English visitors had no charms for her. She knew everybody in the old quarter, she would say, and everybody knew her; and, if the fancy should take her to go off to Jericho, she would have nothing to do but to lock her door, hang up her key on a nail in the dingy bureau below, and go. She should find everything on her return exactly as she had left it, and her comings and goings would not surprise or concern anybody.

The rooms occupied by Miss Wells and her friend, whom she had established in her own quarters, after a brief inspection had satisfied her that this was a case for the active exercise of her own especial calling, were pleasantly situated on the second floor of a rambling old hotel—it no longer exists—and they opened into a wide corridor which led to a staircase at either end. The lofty rooms, with tall windows commanding a lovely view, communicated with each other from one extremity of the corridor to the other; and between the rooms at one end, which did not belong to Miss Wells, and those at the other end, which did, there was, as was generally

the case with buildings of that age, an ordinary door, not "condemned," but only locked. In this one a square pane of greenish glass was inserted in the upper panel—no one could divine with what purpose, for it was too high to be looked through, and it admitted no light, for the door was in the cross-wall close to the outer wall, while the windows were on the opposite side. Miss Wells had a notion that this unreasonable little window in the door had been made to enable somebody to watch a mad person unseen, in the time when the hotel was a private house belonging to an old Savoyard family: but it was in the upper panel, and in that case the invisible eye must have been set in the head of a giant. A heavy table, laden with books, was placed across the door with the window in it; and the room, which was pleasant and less bare than the others of the suite, was appropriated to Mrs. Monro.

The young widow was very peaceful in these later days, being well cared for by the brisk and clever woman, whose warmest feelings were enlisted on her behalf. She was under no delusion about her own state; she was happy in the conviction that she had but a short time to live, and in the serenity of that certainty she took more interest in others than she had done since the sea had swallowed up all the worth of her life. Miss Wells' only brother had been saved from the shipwreck in which Kenneth Monro was lost, and had brought home the intelligence; but he died shortly afterwards in the very room which Mrs. Monro now occupied. Their dead formed the link between the strangely-contrasted friends.

On their quiet life Laura shone like a sunbeam, warming and brightening it. She was delighted with Miss Wells, and proud of her conquest of that rather sturdy-natured person, who had a theoretical aversion to fine ladies, but in reality regarded with pleased curiosity the *faits et gestes* of a brilliant creature of the human-butterfly order, whose ways were so entirely different from her own. Laura's beauty and Laura's dress were objects of unwearying admi-

ration to Miss Wells, whose own looks had never occupied her attention, and whose own attire was of a florid description.

"You could not imitate that sort of thing," said Miss Wells; "you must be born to it to dress as Mrs. Thornton does—just as if everything she wears was specially invented for her! And did you ever see a man so much in love with his wife as Mr. Thornton is? He really seems to have no eyes or ears for any one else. If she was to be spoilt, I think he must certainly spoil her."

"I fancy she gets a good deal of spoiling from every one. I am sure she does from you," returned Mrs. Monro, smiling; "but she bears it well. She has a kindly nature, if not a deep one, and she is not hardened by happiness."

This was a true judgment. Laura Thornton was supremely happy in those days. She had only two troubles. One was, that she could not have her father with her until after her return to England; the other was, that Mr. Thornton had taken it into his head that the child, for whose birth she might look in the autumn, must see the light in his own country. Of course, the child was to be a son; everything was so prosperous with Laura that she took this for granted, and always thought of the coming baby as "he;" and she tolerated, if she did not share, her husband's prejudice in favour of Scotland.

But the house at the Mains was not ready to receive them; if it had been, she would have acknowledged the grandson of the self-made man ought to be born in the mansion that was to be ancestral in the future; but Laura did not take kindly to the prospect of the Stone House and Miss Thornton. She thought even Hunsford and Lady Rosa would be better than that. However, since Robert had old-fashioned notions, and regarded the coming event with solemnity which she hardly comprehended, she would not oppose his wishes. He was so good to her in all things, that he deserved some concession, and she must put up with a spell of dulness somewhere under any circumstances.

So she behaved well about this matter, consoling herself with the reflection that the time was still distant, and that Paris and London lay between, and taking a great deal of pleasure out of life in the meantime.

To the childless woman, for whom life was slowly but surely closing, Laura's light way of regarding the benediction of motherhood was strange and unpleasant; but she did not blame Laura, for she knew that this was the way of Laura's "world," and that she was what the training and associations of her previous life had made her. She could even be amused by Laura's stories of the serious epistles with which Miss Thornton favoured her, and their store of precepts which might have been followed half a century earlier in the history of the world. Laura had a clear perception of the absurd side of everything, and she laughed unrestrainedly at the anticipatory anxieties of the spinster aunt who had had charge of Robert Thornton's childhood, and who remembered it with distinctness only to be emulated by a mother. To Mrs. Monro, who knew the old lady so well, the spirited description had a characteristic meaning.

"I do believe," said Laura, "she sees him in knickerbockers and the Latin grammar already."

"And Lady Rosa Chumleigh?" asked Miss Wells, to whose imagination a Lady Rosa, with a daughter like Laura, was a most fortunate and enviable personage. "I suppose she is equally pleased and anxious?"

Laura was on the point of saying that Lady Rosa regarded the prospect of becoming a grandmother with complete indifference, but she checked herself. She would not yield to the temptation of saying unpleasant things about her own mother to a stranger, however strongly the contrast struck her sense of humour; but, as a matter of fact, Lady Rosa had dismissed the matter in three lines, briefly recommending Laura to take care of herself, and to be sure to see an English doctor wherever she might be. The notion of Scotland was too ridiculous. Why should Laura not remain in her own house in London?

The utterances of Lady Rosa were not sympathetic, but as Laura had not expected they would be, it was not disappointed or hurt feeling which made her say nothing about her mother's letter to Mr. Thornton. It was a kind of shame and pity for that mother—a feeling different from the mere weariness and vexation that Lady Rosa generally produced. The higher order of character with which she had associated of late had so far influenced Laura that she was beginning to perceive the soul of things.

Had she learned to love her husband? Had she learned to prize his love—which elevated her to an eminence which she had perception enough to appreciate, and just a little to dread—as the greatest of treasures and the richest of blessings? No. Laura had learned to like her husband very much; to feel all the respect for him of which she was capable; and to be so well assured and confident of her own power over him that she no longer felt vaguely uncomfortable, and as if some constant effort were required of her. At first she had felt that there was a standard in his mind which she did not comprehend, but she was sure she could not attain to, and she hated to feel this; she disliked an uneasy consciousness that she was not what he supposed her. That uneasiness had, however, left her now. It would never have existed had Laura been able to understand aright the love she had won. From the moment in which Robert Thornton perceived that a solitude *à deux* was not his wife's notion of happiness, he relinquished the project of finding his own in it, and she enjoyed all the novelty and pleasure of foreign travel and society to her heart's content. With the yacht in attendance, they had sojourned wheresoever she fancied during the winter, and he had schooled himself into content with the share she gave him of her heart, her sympathy, and her company. He had expected too much at first; she knew at once too much and too little of the world; too much to be unconscious of its attractions, too little to be convinced of its emptiness, and wearied of its exactions; he must be patient, and the paradisaical time

would come. It would surely come with the child, who, if a new claimant upon Laura's heart, would, at least, be one with whom he could bear to share it, one who could not cause him a pang of jealousy, for whom, on the contrary, he might be jealous, if the deeper depths of his wife's nature were not stirred by the new and sacred touch.

Laura had early discerned in her husband's disposition that tendency to jealousy which is in some cases an attribute of temper, but in others the inseparable defect of the quality of strong affections. She was a clear-headed person enough, and she made up her mind not to provoke the demon, as much, to do her justice, for her husband's sake as for her own. She had had her little spark of romance in her life; she had trodden it out, deliberately, if not altogether of her own free will, and she had no reason to complain that the reality she had accepted in exchange was disappointing in any way. To the "might have been" she never voluntarily turned her thoughts, after the first pain of her interview with Edward Dunstan had passed away; and, if a speculation about how, where and when they should meet, if ever, crossed them, it was not attended by any solicitude. Laura was not of a disposition to feel apprehension about the future; she acted on the maxim which in homely phrase bids us not "bid the devil good-morrow until we meet him." No doubt she had been sorry for herself, and more sorry for Dunstan, but all that was over. Charming, popular, and admired as she was, the most jealous husband could have found no fault with her; her manners were quite free from coquetry, and her easy enjoyment of the pleasures of society was of the frankest kind. Thus, except in the sense of a fading hope of what her feelings towards himself might come to be, a sense which was revealing to him, little by little, the truth that he had expected of her what she had not to give, Robert Thornton did not feel the serpent's fang.

We have seen how Captain Dunstan speculated on what might possibly be Laura's feelings concerning his marriage, and, although he was mistaken in supposing that her self-

complacency would be rudely shaken, Laura did hear of the event with a twinge of mortification. She would not have acknowledged this; she would have been disgusted at the bare notion it could have been suspected; nevertheless she had betrayed it to Julia. It was very soon, she thought, after all his protestations and his despair. How like a man! However, she had no business, and no inclination to think about it; and, although she could not help feeling a little curiosity, she would avoid indulging it by asking questions either of Sir Wilfrid Esdaile or Mrs. Monro. She was tolerably certain that Sir Wilfrid, having been with Dunstan at Southampton, must know something, if not all; and if Dunstan had told his wife, as was not unlikely, what more probable than that Janet would feel curious about her, and question Mrs. Monro. In case she did so, there should at least be no curiosity on Laura's side to report. Thus it happened that, after the one casual mention of Mrs. Dunstan on the day of their meeting on the Castle Hill, she was not again mentioned by Laura and Mrs. Monro.

The brief attack of hurt vanity from which Laura suffered was assuaged by the fact that Dunstan's marriage removed the one little difficulty from her own path. She had nothing to fear from his impetuosity now; his own fickleness, his own readiness to obliterate the past by a new tie, had amply condoned hers. It was not a very long step from this consoling consideration, to wondering where and how she and Mrs. Dunstan would probably meet, what they would think of each other, and whether Dunstan's Janet was as charming as her Janet. The dead past buried itself with wholesome celerity in Laura's case. She drew several pictures in her imagination of the meeting which was to be.

Mrs. Monro was again better towards the close of Laura's stay at Nice, and able to drive out with her friend. The *Firefly* was to make one last cruise along the coast, with Mr. Thornton and Sir Wilfrid Esdaile on board, before going home. A pleasant party assembled for the embarka-

tion. Laura, Mrs. Monro, and Miss Wells were to drive to Beaulieu after they had taken leave of the gentlemen, whose return was to be looked for in three days.

"I am glad to keep Esdaile out of mischief even for so short a time," Mr. Thornton said to his wife that morning, "and you must keep him up to coming on to Paris with us. He is horribly reckless, and the set here is worse than ever, if possible."

The farewells were spoken, with smiles and good wishes on the part of the ladies. Mr. Thornton foretold a delightful cruise, and anticipated increased fame for the *Firefly*. Miss Wells promised him that she would be responsible for Laura's taking care of herself during his cruise. He had taken leave of his wife, and was about to step into the boat, when he turned back, said something to her in a whisper, and kissed her. As they drove away, her companions saw that Laura's eyes were full of tears.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A WING OF THE "FIREFLY."

It was an unusually emphatic entreaty that she would take care of herself during his absence, with a word of reference to the hope that rendered her doubly precious to him, that Robert Thornton had addressed to his wife at parting, and his words had strangely touched her. He rarely gave expression to his absorbing love of her; contenting himself with the anticipation of her wishes, and the moulding of his life upon her tastes. He had discerned, in very early days, with the sure instinct of a great affection, that Laura lacked sentiment, and, although he did not imagine that, in her case, this indicated symptom of shallowness of heart, he was extremely sensitive to the slightest touch of the ridiculous being associated in her mind with him. Thus, while the laying out of the hours of every day brought her tributes of his affection, his care, his forethought, his devotion, he dealt little in endearing epithets, or verbal compliments to the

beauty and the charm which held his heart as securely as they had won it promptly.

Perhaps because she was so bright and happy, the weather so lovely, the face of nature so smile-bedecked, because freedom, and wealth, and the power of pleasing were such good things to own ; perhaps because deeper chords of her nature were stirred by the new meaning that was coming into her life ; there was in Laura's heart, while those tears stood in her eyes, a warmer feeling for her husband than had ever been there before, and in her intelligence a truer comprehension of him. She had at that moment a glimpse at least of the worth of the undivided love and perfect loyalty of such a heart as his. She wished he had not been leaving her. There was something she wanted to say to him ; she did not know what, exactly ; it would have come to her if he had not gone away. A clear, rapid vision of her life since she had first seen Robert Thornton passed through Laura's mind before the brief silence between herself and her companions was broken.

The impression of the morning was not transitory, and the first practical form that it took was one which Laura knew would be pleasing to her husband. After she had left her friends at their own abode, she devoted the remainder of the afternoon to writing to Miss Thornton. Laura felt herself "good" while she was doing this, and she wanted to feel "good" that day It was never an easy task for her to write to Miss Thornton. The old lady's views were so different from Laura's, and she held them with so much energy and decision—she was so ignorant of Laura's "world," and disposed to hold it in such slight esteem, that there was reasonable ground for Laura's remissness as a correspondent ; it was not mere laziness, as Mr. Thornton said it was, when he gently urged her to show the fitting respect to his only relative.

"Be just yourself in your letters," he would say to Laura, when she objected that it was difficult to write ; and she had not liked to say to him that "just herself" had

not been so fortunate as to captivate the aunt as well as the nephew.

On the present occasion, however, her task was not at all difficult; there was one subject which she could always make interesting to Miss Thornton. She would give her a full, true, and particular history of Robert's proceedings—she thought of him as "Robert" this time—since they had arrived at Nice; she would tell her about the *Firefly*; and finally, she would wind up by making a positive promise that the expected heir should be born in Scotland. She had not fully assented to Robert's wishes on that point, though she had no real intention of opposing them; she had been tiresome, capricious, and careless about it, and he would be so glad when he came back to know that she had written such a letter. And she would enclose one of the photographs of Robert that had just been done; she had not had time to look at them.

Laura went to her husband's room to look for the parcel, and she lingered there awhile, idly touching the things on the dressing-table, and turning over the books. A portrait of herself was placed upon an easel by the window. "If we were only to stay in a place for a day," thought Laura, "he would have that unpacked and set up." She looked over the parcel of photographs, and selected the best for Miss Thornton. Robert made a good photograph, she thought; the placid, truthful, manly face came out well under the scrutiny of the sunlight. She propped the card-portrait up on her desk, and glanced at it many times while she was writing, with smiles which would have fallen like sunbeams on Robert Thornton's heart, if he could have seen them.

Her letter completed, it was time for Laura to dress for a dinner at the villa of a Russian princess. She wished she had not said she would go, and allowed Robert to arrange that she should take Sir John and Lady Carteret in her carriage; she felt disposed for a quiet evening with a book. It would have been quite another thing if Robert had been with her. Dressing was a bore. There were some gowns

in a box just come from Paris, and she had thought of wearing one of them, but she changed her mind. She would wear a gown that Robert had noticed a day or two previously, and, as ornaments, her cats'-eyes. What trouble Robert had taken about those beautiful jewels!—what a fine set he had succeeded in getting!

The shifting shimmer of the gems became the sparkling little beauty well, and never had Laura looked more sparkling or more beautiful than on that night. Laura's spirits rose high; she was pleased with the company, satisfied with herself, and honestly wished all the time that her husband were by her side.

The moon was shining over the Bay of the Angels when Laura came back to the hotel in the Promenade des Anglais, and its rays turned the distant sails on the horizon to the likeness of silver wings. The *Firefly's* were not of the number, Laura knew; she was a swift vessel, even without steam, and was far, far away by this time, distinguishing herself, doubtless, during her last cruise for the season. The town, the gardens, the background of hills, the jutting-out promontory, the wide, calm expanse of steel-blue sea under the wide, calm expanse of steel-blue sky, with the lesser lights that rule the night ablaze in it; the atmosphere so clear that every object was defined with a blade-like sharpness; all made up a picture on which not the most accustomed eyes could rest without a fresh sense of calm and elevated pleasure. Laura looked out of her window for long after she was left alone, with a deeper feeling than its beauty had ever before aroused in her, and said to herself when at length she turned away: "And it must be equally still and beautiful all along the coast. A glorious night at sea."

The morning showed a change; the wind was chill, the sky was overcast, and Laura's daily message of inquiry for Mrs. Monro was answered by Miss Wells to the effect that she would not venture to go out that day. Laura had made some engagements, but she did not feel inclined to fulfil them; she was in an idle mood, and disposed for nothing more lively than a visit to her friends in the old

town. She sent her excuses to the people who would expect to see her, and wished it was not too early to call on Mrs. Monro. It had not occurred to Laura that she could feel lonely and weary just because Robert was to be away on a three days' cruise; too lonely and weary to avail herself of the provision he had made for her pleasure; but so it was, and the society of two persons, who had nothing at all in common with the world in which Laura habitually lived, was the only resource against the depression that was stealing over her to which she could turn without distaste.

And, somehow, she thought differently to-day from what she had thought yesterday about Mrs. Monro. She had been too sanguine; these variations were common in the insidious malady that had taken hold of her friend. Miss Wells was not deceived by the false strength and the fitful spirits which might easily delude one less experienced. There came over Laura a sense of the terrible reality of suffering and death which are in the background of every life, and it frightened her, as though she had learned for the first time that such things were, and did not know how to bear, or where to shelter herself from, the knowledge. A glimpse of something in life other than she had ever been taught came to her—something in the minds of serious people, like her husband and Miss Thornton, for instance, which could help them in times of trouble from which there was no exemption or escape for any one, was coming to Laura. This thing was not formula, or cant, or fashion; it was something which Mrs. Monro possessed, and which was helping her along a path now discerned aright for the first time by Laura, the path which lay through pain, and led to death.

What was it? Love? No; that was gone from Mrs. Monro, or rather it was changed into grief, and even Laura, though of the same bauble and bubble order in which Amabel Ainslie classed herself, knew that a broken heart helps no one on the way of life. Was it courage? No. Mrs. Monro was not a woman of the courageous kind, even when in health. Was it religion? Laura asked herself that question for the first time in her life, now that in some unaccountable way the inexorability of the law of suffering

which rules human existence revealed itself to her. She must think of this; she must see to this. What had come to her between yesterday and to-day, to inspire her with thoughts such as she had never had previously, and to make her afraid? Her prosperous young life lay all around and ahead of her, bright and smiling like the summer sea of yesterday: and it could hardly be that a few hours' solitude, and a change of weather had affected her so strongly.

The pleasant motherly manner of Miss Wells became downright petting where Laura was concerned, and she was amusingly interested in the "goings on" of the gay busy, and great people, into whose ways and customs she got no more than side peeps, through the nooks and crannies of gossip.

Mrs. Monro was asleep when Laura arrived, and having gladdened Miss Wells with the announcement that she meant to remain "quite hours," installed herself in the spacious sitting-room at the end of the apartment. When they had talked awhile of the invalid, Laura had to tell of the grandeurs and gaieties of the preceding evening, the emeralds and opals of the Grand Duchess, and the "historic" lace of the Princess. She saw that Miss Wells was a little worn and anxious, and so she exerted herself for her amusement, and to turn the current of her ideas.

Meanwhile Laura's thoughts were busy with Miss Wells' life: she was trying to realise its self-sacrifice, and to imagine in what its rewards, which were not tangible or ostensible, might possibly consist. Her large income was expended upon the sick and suffering, its "margin" was what was allotted to herself: her time and strength, the skill and patience, the tenderness and cheerfulness which were evident to all were theirs also. How did she do it; and what was her reward? With the strange sense upon her that she was learning something strange and vague which would have to clear itself in her mind, Laura listened to the stories of Miss Wells' experiences, which she induced her to tell, the gossip being exhausted, and felt herself drawn more and more to this woman, who was so homely and so good.

The long talk was uninterrupted, for when Mrs. Monro awoke and Miss Wells left Laura and went to her, she pre-

ferred to be quiet for the time. So the hours went on, and Laura was about unwillingly to take her leave and return to dine in solitary state at her hotel, when a servant came to tell Miss Wells that a person, who was waiting in the vestibule, wanted to see her. Miss Wells excused herself to Laura, begged that she would not go away—this was merely a message from one of her poor people, no doubt; nothing to detain her—and left the room.

"That is, I suppose," thought Laura, "one of the best women in the world; who never did a deliberately wrong act, and very likely has done very few accidentally wrong ones. And yet, if I had done anything wicked, and was sorry for it, and wanted to be helped out of it, I would come and tell her, and be sure that she would help me. Why, I wonder? There's more in it than her having taken a fancy to me, and I to her. And if—if trouble and sorrow were to come to me, I think she would show me how to bear them."

She shivered, drew her mantle round her, walked to the window, and looked out, left the window and turned over the music that lay scattered on the piano. Thus several minutes passed, and Laura was beginning to wonder at the prolonged absence of Miss Wells, when the door opened, and Mrs. Monro, wearing a white Indian shawl over her widow's dress, but trembling with cold notwithstanding, entered the room. Laura greeted her with surprise and delight, saying that she had not hoped to see her that day at all.

"And our days at Nice are getting few," she added, "so that I grudge one." All the time she was thinking how dreadfully ill Mrs. Monro was looking, much worse than she had yet seen her look, and that her days were also getting few.

"I want you to stay with me this evening," said Mrs. Monro, who spoke with a strange difficulty. "You will, I am sure. I felt so sure, that I told them to send away your carriage. You do not mind dining without dressing, for once."

Her eyes wandered; she seemed hardly conscious of what she was saying; she sank into a chair, and panted for breath, while the damps of suffering or of agitation gathered on her lips and forehead.

"Of course I will stay," said Laura, bending over her in great distress and solicitude. "I am very glad to stay, very grateful to you for asking me, for I was just thinking how dull and dreary an evening I should have to pass, all alone, and I really cannot go out without Robert. You are in pain—you are very, very ill!" she added, for Mrs. Monro had uttered a groan.

"No, no, it will pass away in a moment." But she caught Laura's hand and pressed it against her own closed eyes, and she trembled in every limb.

No thought except of Mrs. Monro's illness crossed Laura's mind as she bent over her, in the perplexity of ignorance, wishing with all her heart that Miss Wells would come back, and that she herself were more useful and capable of help.

The person who was waiting in the vestibule to see Miss Wells proved to be one of the servants from the hotel at which Mr. and Mrs. Thornton were staying, and his errand was to request her to come with him on the instant to Sir Wilfrid Esdaile. A pencilled line from Sir Wilfrid confirmed the message, and added that the writer knew Mrs. Thornton was with her, and had to entreat Miss Wells to come at once without letting her know.

"Where is he?" This was all Miss Wells said.

The man led her along the corridor, and opening the outer door of the room which adjoined the last one of her own suite, and the senseless little window in the cross-door looked into it, he let her pass through.

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, who was pacing the room on the farther side, came towards Miss Wells, showing her a face more changed and ghastly than she had ever seen on a living man. She shrank back, and faltered out:

"What is it? What has happened? The yacht——"

"Yes! No! Oh, Miss Wells, what are we to do? He is dead! How is she to be told? I found out at the hotel that she was here, and I have come to you."

They stood opposite each other in silence for a full minute; then Miss Wells made a sign to him to speak, and, covering her face with her hands, listened.

"The weather had been beautiful all day, the wind fair,

and the yacht behaving splendidly. The night was also beautiful, and we stayed up talking until after midnight. I left him, and went below, and then—I don't know quite how it happened, nobody can tell exactly—there was a change of wind, and they were doing something with the sails. I know as little as you of such things, and can't explain anything but the dreadful facts; I don't know whether anybody is to blame—he did not see what was doing, or they did not see him—he was struck, by the fluttering sail, I suppose, by some part of the tackle, at all events, and fell overboard. I was up in a moment, and we saw him.—We saw him in the smooth sea under the bright moonlight; he was keeping himself up in the water, and it seemed as though he could easily catch the ropes that were out in a moment. It seemed, too, only a minute or two, and yet an age, until a boat was lowered, but in that minute he had gone down. I was at the side, and looking at him. I don't know whether the men felt any great alarm; I did, but that is because I know nothing of the sea and ships; I think they had no thought but that he would be saved. I saw his face as he dropped his head and went down. We rowed about for hours, until long after it was daylight—the men did it because I asked them, useless as it was—then we brought the yacht back. There is a crowd at the harbour now, and all is known at the hotel. Thank Heaven his poor wife is here. How will she bear it? How is she to be told?"

"I don't know," said Miss Wells, faintly; and pointing to the wall with a shaking hand, "she is there, happy, hopeful, beautiful. I don't know how she is to be told. I cannot do it, if that is what you mean."

"Yes; that is what I mean," said Sir Wilfrid solemnly. "Think that she is quite alone, except for her servants, and that I am only a man! She must not leave this, and go back to the hotel ignorant of what has occurred; she would hear it in the street, or from the people here."

"Ah," said Miss Wells, with a start; "there's the danger. She may not have waited for me. Stay here until I come back."

He remained in the fast darkening room. Presently she returned, and Sir Wilfrid Esdaile saw in her face, which had lost its look of terror, that she would do what he asked, and was nerving herself for the task.

"I have sent Mrs. Monro to persuade her to remain with us; she will not suspect her, for she knows she has been very ill to-day; and I could not see her yet. But I will do it, Sir Wilfrid, though it is like taking up a knife to kill her. Just after she has been talking out her happy young heart to me."

"It is dreadful, but it must be done. And there are arrangements, statements——" Sir Wilfrid paused, struck anew by the awfulness of the vanishing away of the man who had been with them but yesterday, a very type of the enviable among human beings. If they could have taken Laura to him, as he lay in that great calm of death which at least stills the revolt and tempest of grief, there would have been less dread over them both for the result of what she had to be told; but this resource was not theirs, the solace of the last farewell was not to be hers. The bark of her happiness had indeed

> gone down at sea,
> When Heaven was all tranquillity.

"When she has been told, it will be best to telegraph for her father; but the first thing is to tell her. I will remain here."

"No; come to my rooms."

He followed her at once. A little group of people had gathered at the head of the staircase; the man from the other hotel was talking, and being talked to, in whispers. There was a dead silence as Miss Wells and Sir Wilfrid Esdaile came along the corridor, and, taking no notice of them, entered the other apartment.

"I have never seen you so ill," Laura was saying, as Miss Wells came into the room, and approached Mrs. Monro and herself, "and you are frightened. Is there anything very unusually wrong with you? Oh, Miss Wells, I am so glad you have come back. She is—but you are frightened too. What is it?"

She let go Mrs. Monro's hand, and stood upright.

"I am frightened, my dear"—Miss Wells came quickly, and put her arms round her—"frightened for you. I have come to tell you bad news; news of a very great sorrow—the greatest that could come to you."

"Papa!" exclaimed Laura, clutching Miss Wells with both her hands. "Papa! Is he dead?"

"No, no. Let me hold you while you hear it; and try, try to bear it, for his sake, and his child's."

"Robert?"

She said only that one word; she saw the answer that Miss Wells could not speak; she lifted her hands and pushed her hair off her forehead, then, with a wild white smile, dropped between the arms that strove in vain to hold her, as if she had been shot.

CHAPTER XXX.

"TOO LATE!"

"IT is totally impossible for your uncle to go to her, and I am sure I don't know what is to be done!"

Thus spoke Lady Rosa Chumleigh, in accents of dismay, to Julia Carmichael, some time after Sir Wilfrid Esdaile's telegram had reached Hunsford. The message arrived in the evening, and was received by Lady Rosa, in the absence of the Colonel, who was a prisoner in his room with a persistent fit of the gout, which severely tried Lady Rosa's temper, and invariably found it wanting. Julia was with her, and it is needless to say that the intelligence of Mr. Thornton's death caused them both a great shock, and keen though differently-felt sorrow. Lady Rosa's heart was not sufficiently tender, nor was her imagination of a sufficiently vivid kind, to force her into a realisation of the grief and terror of her daughter's position, so that she was not rendered powerless by the pain of such a picture in her mind. Happily her practical habits exerted their influence, and long before Julia could get beyond a horrified vision of Laura, and a dread of how this news might affect the Colonel, Lady Rosa was revolving the question of the moment—what was to be done?

"Let me see the telegram again." Julia handed the green paper to Lady Rosa.

"It does not say that Laura wishes her father to go to her. 'Colonel Chumleigh had better come as soon as possible;' that is Sir Wilfrid Esdaile's own message."

"Yes; but Laura would of course wish it. She would not have been able to send any message of her own; she would have known nothing, been consulted about nothing under such circumstances."

"True. And there's no one there with any sense, I dare say; her servants no doubt are all fools, and all ignorant and selfish; besides, she could not be left to them at any rate."

"Sir Wilfrid has plenty of sense, and the kindest heart in the world; and there is her friend Mrs. Monro, and that Miss Wells whom Laura said so much about in her last letter. She is not alone, thank Heaven; but still——"

"They are not her own people, and none of them can bring her home. What can be done? I cannot leave your uncle. And I am a wretched person on such occasions, even if I could go to Nice."

"Let me go," said Julia, by a sudden impulse. "My going will be better than nothing. At leaat I can take care of her on her journey home. I can take Freeman, and start to-morrow morning. My uncle will not object, I am sure. Do let me telegraph to Sir Wilfrid that I am coming."

On reflection this did seem to be the best thing that could be done, and Lady Rosa went to the Colonel's room on the sad errand of telling him what had befallen his darling daughter.

The intelligence affected Colonel Chumleigh very deeply. He had liked Robert Thornton much, and trusted him thoroughly; he had felt perfect ease and security with regard to Laura, founded on the worth and the steadiness of her husband's character; and it had afforded him a great deal of quiet pleasure to indulge in imaginary pictures—of which no one would have suspected Colonel Chumleigh—of Laura, her home, and her children in the future years. In all the details of the house that was being prepared for her in London, the Colonel had taken the utmost interest, and his

chief pleasure was the reading of the frequent long talky letters, as Laura called them, which she wrote to him from the various points of her foreign sojourn. He remembered with a pang what a continuous record of Robert Thornton's love and care, of her own happiness and prosperity, those letters formed; he murmured impatiently against the pain and helplessness that held him back from his poor child—his bright Firefly, with her wings so sadly singed—wondering how it was with her, whether she had found a resource in her youth and strength against the anguish that had overtaken her, sufficient, at least, to prevent her from being quite prostrate. The most difficult thing for Lady Rosa and the Colonel was to realise that the dreadful event had happened so recently, that their daughter's widowhood was not yet two days old. Like all who hear of a calamity at a distance, they felt at first as if it were impossible, and then as if it had happened long ago. It was Lady Rosa's usual way to treat every contrariety in the light of a personal injury and insult, offered out of spite, whether by Providence or by inferior persons, to an individual of her exalted station and merit; but the suddenness and the extent of this disaster overbore her usual way, and by appalling, softened her. The father and mother talked of their child, far off in her great trouble, and of Robert Thornton, with more unity of feeling than was habitual to them. The Colonel's distress at being unable to go to Laura was keen, and he immediately assented to Julia's undertaking the journey that was impossible to himself.

Many hours of the night passed in dreary conjecture and sorrowful reminiscence. They were not unmindful of Miss Thornton, and wondered whether the sad intelligence had yet been communicated to her. And then they remembered what a great significance, in addition to its sadness, the death of her nephew would have for the old lady in the lonely house in Scotland.

"To think," said Lady Rosa, "that so much depends upon Laura's health holding out now. If the baby is not born alive, or does not live, the poor old lady will be a very rich woman. However, there's one comfort, she would

certainly leave it all to Laura. She cared for nobody but Robert, and he cared for nobody but Laura, so that she will be safe, I should think, in any case. It will make a terrible difference to her, though, if she has to come in after the old lady. Of course there will be no change in any way until the child comes to settle everything."

At this point the Colonel ceased to be able to follow the speculations of Lady Rosa. He could only dwell on the cruel destruction that might come to all the hopes of his daughter, on his own fears for her health, on the sudden setting of the sun on so fair a day, that to the early fallen night a deeper darkness still might be added. He was growing old, and Laura might be left without her father before long, and her mother and she never agreed, even when Laura was a girl at home, and had acted, very much for his sake, on the principle of "anything for a quiet life." The Colonel was deeply troubled; so deeply that it seemed to him all that had troubled him previously in his life had been mere vexations. His son's boyish mischief, Lady Rosa's railing, the "tightness" of money from which he had never been quite delivered; all these seemed of little account to him now, when one of the really tragic events of human existence had happened, and the person concerned most nearly was the darling of his own heart.

He was pleased with Julia, and grateful to her. She was showing good sense and character; he had noticed that she had greatly matured of late. She got on better with Lady Rosa than Laura had ever done, and he fancied she generally had much more of her own way. She was different from Laura, better fitted to battle with the world. There was not much fight in his Firefly; a fairy-queen-like wilfulness and sunny fortunateness had been hers hitherto; the first blow dealt her by fate was a tremendous one. Would she be completely incapacitated by it?

The weight of these and many other thoughts was heavy upon the slow-thinking Colonel, and so oppressed him that after Julia had taken leave of him the next morning, what with the burden of them, and that of his pain, he wished he could have done, as the people in the Bible

seemed to find it so enviably easy to do—turned his face to the wall, and died.

It had occurred to Julia that it would be well to give Sir Wilfrid Esdaile an opportunity of communicating with her, and she had telegraphed that on reaching London she would go to Mr. Thornton's house in Prince's Gardens. This she did, and was received by the housekeeper, who handed her a second telegram from Sir Wilfrid, to the effect that Laura was pretty well, and most thankful to know that her cousin was coming to her. The housekeeper informed her that she had been instructed to prepare for the reception of Mrs. Thornton, who would return to London so soon as she was able to travel.

"And a sad coming home too," she added.

Julia had to dispose of some hours before she could start for Dover, and she employed a portion of the time in going over the house.

Although the smaller touches of individual taste, and the comfortable air of habitation, were wanting to the house, it had not the more formal and staring grandeur of a mansion which has been fitted up by a fashionable upholsterer. The furniture was neither slavish in its following of a school, nor fantastic in the avoidance of sameness, and there was nothing to mark the vulgar exultation of wealth in the costly, but simple abode which the son of the self-made man had prepared for his wife.

Not the strictest or the most exclusive of the noble Nesses could have desired a more perfect suite of rooms for herself than those that awaited Laura; not Robert's father, the self-made man, in the old days at Bedford Square, had been content with plainer furniture and simpler surroundings than those reserved for the use of the master of the house.

Julia recognised the manliness and simplicity which she had admired in the friend they had all lost when she passed through his "own rooms," and saw how they testified to his contempt for the effeminacy and self-indulgence of the day. He disliked *bric-à-brac* and *bibelots*, gimcrackery of all kinds, as much as he disliked fine clothes, and would almost as soon have told a falsehood or maligned a friend,

as he would have stuck china plates about his study, or worn a velvet morning-coat. The only *article de luxe* in the "own rooms" of the master, whose foot was never to cross their threshold, were books. Of them there was a noble store; it would have astonished the self-made man, who in his time had not held with books. His portrait in a brown coat, and a wig of the same colour, and seemingly similar texture, occupied a place of honour in the study, and Julia recognised in this fact also a trait in Robert Thornton's character.

Julia had completed her survey of the upper rooms, and was getting ready to resume her journey, when another message reached her. This time the sender was Laura herself. "Pray rest for a few hours in Paris. Rooms are retained for me at Meurice's. Go there, and come on by the night train."

Julia's first idea was to disregard this injunction. She did not think she should be tired, and her chief object was to reach Laura with as little delay as possible. She reckoned, however, without that troublesome element, her maid. Absorbed in anticipation of the scene to which she was hastening, busy with the past and the future, Julia did not think about the weather, and was indifferent to fatigue; but Freeman had no such motives for rising above circumstances, and she arrived in Paris in a state of physical and moral limpness which reduced Julia to the alternative of either giving her time to recover herself, or going on without her. She would have preferred to do the latter, but prudence prevailed, and, fretting vainly at the delay, she drove to Meurice's, so heavy of heart, so weary of eye, that the sunny beauty of the lovely city, on one of the most brilliant mornings of a fine spring, passed before her unheeded, though seen for the first time.

Julia passed the interval before she could resume her journey, partly in rest, partly in writing to John Sandilands. When she had finished her letter, she took it herself to the Bureau of the hotel, and while she was asking about the necessary postage-stamp, and the time of departure of the mail, a lady and gentleman, who had just alighted from a carriage at the entrance, passed through the hall to-

wards a staircase on the right. The lady's face was turned away, but her tall slender figure seemed familiar to Julia, also the rich chestnut curls that clustered at the back of her neck, and showed brightly against the deep blue of her velvet dress. She had but a glimpse of the lady; the next moment she had passed out of sight, the gentleman came back across the hall, approached the Bureau, and met Julia, face to face.

The gentleman was Captain Dunstan. It gave her a shock of pain to recognise him; the recollection of him had never crossed her mind among all the thoughts which had occupied it since the news came.

"Miss Carmichael! You in Paris! This is an unexpected pleasure."

This hurriedly—but while they shook hands, he saw by her face that there was something wrong.

"Mrs. Dunstan will be delighted. Is your party staying here?"

Julia had not yet spoken an intelligible word. She now said she was merely passing through Paris on her way to Nice, to join her cousin, Mrs. Thornton. Perhaps Captain Dunstan had heard?

No; he had heard nothing. Had anything happened? There were several people near, and recollection had come to Julia in a full tide. She could not speak of her errand there: so she asked Captain Dunstan to accompany her to Mrs. Thornton's rooms. Greatly wondering, he did so; and then, with more agitation than she had betrayed since the intelligence had reached Lady Rosa and herself, Julia told him what had happened. The mere passing of the knowledge on to another person who also knew Laura, seemed to break through her enforced composure.

But the tears with which she told the story of Robert Thornton's death were quickly arrested by her astonishment at the effect of the communication upon Captain Dunstan. His quiet, rather languid manner had never given her the impression that he possessed depth of feeling, or capacity for sympathy. What was this which shook him now, which drove every tinge of colour from his face, and set his

hands and lips trembling as a woman's hands and lips might tremble; which made him hardly able to utter the commonplace, "Very sorry, a dreadful event indeed!" He stood for a few seconds after she told him, then sat down and hid his face in his hands.

Presently he spoke again, in a vague kind of way, about her journey and her plans, asking when she would be in Paris again.

"I don't know," Julia answered. "I am quite ignorant of my cousin's intentions, except that she is expected at her house in London. I conclude she will return as soon as she is able to travel."

"And she—Mrs. Thornton—is alone there?"

"But for her new friends, yes. But, now that I think of it, I am surprised you had not heard, for Mrs. Monro is with her, as well as Sir Wilfrid Esdaile."

"Esdaile! He there! How came he to be with them—with Mrs. Thornton?"

"Did you not know? I have not told you the story clearly. He was on board the yacht when it happened. It was he who sent the news to us. He had been a great deal with them of late."

"I have not heard of him for some time."

Again a spasm of pain seemed to seize him, changing all his features.

"I am sure he has been most kind. I don't know what would have become of my poor cousin if she had not had a friend."

"Ah," he interrupted her, "that will not bear talking of. And now, about yourself. You will not be starting for another hour, you will let Mrs. Dunstan be with you for that time. I have unfortunately an engagement which I must keep"—he was striving hard for composure, and Julia felt that he perceived her wonder—"but I will send for her to come to you, or perhaps you would go to her. She has just come in; you will have tea with her."

"No," said Julia, speaking on an impulse which in the after-time she remembered well; "I would really rather not, if you please. I don't feel able to see her; I could not

bear to make her so unhappy as she would be—for I know how she feels for others—at our first meeting. Pray don't ask me to see her, Captain Dunstan; pray don't trouble her by letting her know I am here. She does not know my cousin; she did not know the poor fellow who is gone; she will not be upset by hearing of it only in the ordinary course. I have no right to trouble and grieve her; and, indeed, it would make me less fit for my journey. Tell her afterwards, give her my love, and say to her that we shall meet in London. I am sure to be with my cousin there."

"If you are quite sure you would rather not——"

"I am, indeed, quite sure. And pray say nothing to Mrs. Dunstan. She might be hurt; she might not understand, indeed, I could not see her. I know you will excuse me if I ask you to leave me now; I have several things to attend to before I go."

She held out her hand in farewell, and he took it in silence.

Dunstan wrote a line and sent it to his wife; then he went out across the busy Rue de Rivoli, all alive with the bustle and gaiety of Paris in the springtide, into the gardens of the Tuileries. He walked like a man in a hurry, like a man pursued, but it was not on account of the engagement of which he had spoken to Julia; for when he had reached the river terrace, he went no farther, but walked up and down under the tender, green canopy, heedless of the loiterers there, many of whom looked inquiringly at his handsome, weary face, with the bent brows and the frowning, troubled eyes. There were many elements in the storm let loose in his heart—rage, pity, forbidden love, resentment against his fate—and their work was wild with him; but all their voices gathered into one utterance, which goaded him by its intolerable whisper, "Too late! too late!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHAT IS IT?

When Captain Dunstan and his wife came home to Bevis, the place that Janet loved so much wore the aspect she loved best. The leaves upon the trees were just unfolding

their pale tints, and there were breaks and vistas in the plantations not yet filled by the plenitude of the summer foliage. The old English garden was prolific of spring flowers, and the slender reed-like plants that have a dozen different names in the various English counties, and the beds of lilies of the valley were crowded with the fairy bells and the dark close-wrapping leaves of the purest and sweetest of flowers. There was a pleasant stir of life and expectation about the place, and the house had a brisk air of preparation. Probably, if Captain Dunstan had not himself been little more than a stranger, his marriage with Miss Monro would not have been taken so well by his neighbours and dependents; but they all knew more about Janet than they knew about him, and public opinion was almost unanimous in her favour.

Mrs. Manners was in a condition of high importance and self-complacency. She did not approve of bachelor households; she preferred having a lady of the house, who could appreciate the blessing of a thoroughly good housekeeper with active thankfulness, and would not regard it merely with the taken-for-granted air that occasionally tried her patience in the case of Captain Dunstan. Then, she knew the "ways" of the new lady of Bevis, and they were pleasant and considerate ways. To her household Janet would be welcome, and she was not one to hold such an assurance in light esteem.

There was something more than formal attention to orders in the preparations that were made for her: many little fancies of hers, in the old times, were remembered and carried out in the arrangement of the rooms in the admiral's corridor for her occupation. Mrs. Manners pointed out and exhibited the rooms with much complacency to Mrs. Cathcart and Miss Ainslie, who called at Bevis to ascertain when Captain and Mrs. Dunstan were expected to arrive.

"I never saw the place looking more beautiful," remarked Amabel, as the two ladies stepped out on the stone terrace from the library window; "the very spirit of rest and peace seems to dwell upon it to-day."

They took their way to the Vicarage through the park,

talking of Janet, and speculating as to whether they should find her changed at all by her introduction to the world of which she had previously known nothing.

"One can never tell by letters," said Amabel, "unless they're from somebody with a special talent for writing letters, and this Janet hasn't; but I cannot help thinking she is more bewildered than pleased by Paris. She will get on better next time she goes there."

"I fancy she will stay at home a good deal. Janet will not get into the fashionable ways, depend upon it."

"She will do whatever Captain Dunstan likes, and he will be bored at Bevis."

"Amabel, you don't like him. Why?"

"Yes, I do. I like him well enough, but I think of him now exactly as I have always thought of him, and I am afraid Janet will not find me half enthusiastic enough about her husband."

"Don't distress yourself, my dear," said Mrs. Cathcart, in a dry tone which she occasionally assumed when she thought Amabel would be the better for a little snubbing; "Janet will not want anybody to be enthusiastic about her husband. Her own enthusiasm will suffice for her, and for him also.'

"Oh, I dare say," answered Amabel, quite indifferent to the snub; but for all that I should not like her to know as well—as you do, for instance—that I consider her a million times too good for him, and a great deal too fond of him. How nice it is to think," she added, with great animation and a sudden change of topic, "that by this time to-morrow we shall have seen her, and in a few days we shall have settled down into the habit of seeing her, mistress of Bevis, and the happiest woman in the world."

"How delighted the old ladies at Bury House will be!"

"Yes, won't they? And that reminds me to tell you a piece of news. Miss Carmichael is coming to Bury House next week. Janet will be very glad of that. We shall be all—or nearly all—together again."

"Yes, with the exception of Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, and he will come down to Bevis before long, I dare say."

"He cannot, for some time, at all events, for he has gone out to Ceylon again."

"Indeed! When and where did you hear about him?"

"On Monday, when I drove over to Bury. I met that dear Miss Susan at the post-office, and did half-an-hour's shopping with her. You have no idea what friends we are! She told me all the news, and there is really a good deal of it, in addition to the strictly parochial intelligence with which Miss Susan is always supplied. Julia Carmichael is coming to Bury House; Sir Wilfrid Esdaile has gone to Ceylon; the plantation that Mr. Sandilands is managing is doing so well, that he is much better off, and the marriage is likely to take place in the autumn."

"But not here, I suppose? Miss Carmichael would be married from her uncle's house, would she not?"

"I don't think so; nothing is settled yet, I fancy. I promised that I would go and see Julia soon after her arrival, so I shall hear all about it then."

"It is very soon for her to be at Bury House again. I thought I understood from the dear old ladies that one of their mild grievances was her being allowed to make them only one visit in the course of the year."

"That was the case, but things are all changed, it seems, by the death of Mr. Thornton. You remember he was drowned somewhere in the Mediterranean; and his poor wife—Julia's pretty cousin, whom she used to talk about—came back to England. Julia went to her, and took care of her; she behaved very well indeed, Miss Susan Sandilands says; and then Mrs. Thornton went up to Scotland—to her husband's place, where his aunt lives—and now Colonel and Lady Rosa Chumleigh are going to join her there, and so Julia got a little bit of extra leave, and is coming to Bury House."

"I remember she used to speak very highly of Mr. Thornton. It is a sad story."

"Sir Wilfrid Esdaile was on board Mr. Thornton's yacht when the accident happened. He behaved with the greatest kindness to poor Mrs. Thornton, made every arrangement for her, and came back as far as Paris with her and Julia."

"I wonder whether he saw Janet there? She did not mention him at all in the two letters I have from her. But of course she did; he would be sure to see Captain Dunstan."

"I have no idea," said Amabel, who would have been glad to know that the friends had met. She had little hope that they had; she believed herself too well acquainted, by force of sympathy, with Sir Wilfrid's feelings, to expect that he had "got over it" to the extent of being willing to see Janet in all her bridal happiness.

"The sad story of poor Mr. Thornton," she added, "is an illustration of the saying about an ill wind, for her cousin's great trouble has had a good effect on Julia's prospects."

"Indeed! How is that?"

"I wish I could relate the matter to you as Miss Sandilands related it to me," and Amabel laughed at the recollection. "It was very funny to observe her anxiety to put everybody concerned in the best possible light, and to avoid censuring any one, although it was quite plain that some blame must attach somewhere. I could not help thinking of Jane Bennet, in 'Pride and Prejudice,' when she hits on a happy combination by which it is just possible that Mr. Darcy and Wickham may both be right. Miss Susan's dilemma was this. If Julia was not wrong in keeping her engagement to Mr. Sandilands concealed from her uncle, because she was afraid of how Lady Rosa Chumleigh would take it, Lady Rosa must be a rather despotic and uncomfortable personage. But far be it from Miss Susan to admit any such evident alternative; you should have heard her amplifying and explaining, and all the time perfectly inaccessible to the consideration that it could not possibly matter to Lady Rosa Chumleigh what I thought about her temper, and her 'ways,' with her family. It all came to this, that the engagement was divulged by Mrs. Thornton—who can do anything just now with her mother—and Lady Rosa took it very well indeed. Mrs. Thornton, and the baby that is coming, and the fortune that depends on the baby, are of paramount importance. Julia may

marry whom she pleases, and go to Bury House if she likes. That is the real meaning of it all. Here we are at the gate, and there is his reverence, reproachfully posted at the window looking for us, and, like Mrs. Gamp, 'droppin' for his tea.'"

With her usual acuteness, Amabel, though she was acquainted with Julia Carmichael only, had rightly apprehended the position of affairs at Hunsford. The future was fair enough now before Julia, and she almost reproached herself that she could feel so happy while the calamity that had stricken Laura was yet so recent. The last words that Sir Wilfrid Esdaile had said to her, as he bade her adieu in Paris, were an intimation that he meant to bring John back with him, and she had not only that promise to think of, but the unexpected solution of her difficulties with her uncle as well. And besides, Janet, sweet, kind, sympathising Janet, would have returned to Bevis, and it would be delightful to see her, happy in her beautiful home.

The day came, and the hour, and Janet and her husband arrived at Bevis. The occasion was of the deepest moment to her, full not only of the incommunicable feelings of the present, but of the memories and associations of the past. They reached home late in the afternoon; and as the carriage turned into the avenue, and Janet was acknowledging the bobs of the gatekeepers' children, who, with scrupulously clean faces and pinafores, were clustered about the entrance to the lodge, the Vicar came towards it.

"Welcome home," said Mr. Cathcart. "I promised Mrs. Cathcart that I would bring her news of you, and make her congratulations."

"We shall see you soon," said Captain Dunstan, graciously.

"Certainly; and my wife to-morrow, I suppose. You have been most anxiously looked for, I assure you, Mrs. Dunstan."

Janet thanked him with a smile; and they went on, leaving him to a renewed impression of her beauty and grace, but with a notion that there was something changed in her expression. Mr. Cathcart was not enthusiastic, like

his wife, about Janet—he was not, indeed, enthusiastic about anything—but he was a quick observer; and the brightness he had noted of late in Janet's face was certainly there no longer.

The arrangements made for her met with entire approval from Mrs. Dunstan, and when she joined her husband in the library before dinner, and he politely hoped she had found all right, she tried very hard to answer as if there had been nothing wanting to this common home. But he had not gone with her to the rooms that were at once so familiar and so strange; he had not looked or spoken as though he had the remotest comprehension of her feelings; this coming home might have been to him the taking up of his abode at an hotel, or in somebody else's house let furnished. He was perfectly kind; he was faultlessly polite; there was not the smallest objection to be taken to his manner towards his wife. But it was "manner." This was not the first, though it was the most significant occasion on which Janet had felt that between him and herself there was an unacknowledged, incomprehensible barrier. What was it? She asked herself the question with remorseless iteration; she sought the reply in unrelenting self-examination; she resented its evasiveness by unceasing self-reproach. She might have found that reply easily enough, if she had only sought for the reason why she could not put the question to Dunstan himself; and have exchanged the torment of doubt and misgiving for an entire relinquishment of hope. But she had so little knowledge outside of her own experience to guide her, and her single-heartedness was so complete, that she could not divine a cause for the sure and certain blight that had fallen on her, except it were some unfortunate error or deficiency of her own.

There had never been a word of dissension, of disagreement between the two. No hasty squabbles, no tiffs had come to break the decorous calm of their life together; and, had Dunstan been called upon to name an instance in which Janet had given him the slightest offence or annoyance, he could not have done so, and he would have been amazed had he been told that she was not happy; for he behaved

very well to her. He had not been false to the compact he had made with himself when he came to the resolution that the best thing he could do would be to marry Miss Monro; and Edward Dunstan had a keen sense of what was necessary to his own preservation from self-reproach. The fates were indeed against him; the one woman whom he loved he had twice lost, the first time by her marriage, the second by his own; but that was his own trouble, deep, bitter, abiding, and, after the fashion of a companion of the kind, was not to be routed or shaken off. It filled his life with profound *ennui*. His wife, however, had nothing to do with that, and Dunstan was untroubled by any misgiving of the excellence of his own conduct. Janet was a more silent person than he had imagined her to be, less easy to amuse; she had not been so much pleased with Paris as he expected; he thought her intelligence had been overrated by her friends. There was also a sort of timidity about her at times which he hoped she would get over, for it was decidedly bad form; but she was very good, and—it was no fault of hers!

Dunstan felt quite magnanimous when he repeated this to himself, persuading himself that he was honestly striving against the consuming distaste for his life that had hung about him ever since the passion of regret and reviling of his fate had subsided; but he had come back with his wife to Bevis under the influence of those feelings.

Several times during their stay in Paris Janet had suffered from an almost terrifying sense of loneliness and strangeness—and she had tried to put it away from her as we thrust back the phantoms that come to us in the sleepless dark. How should this be, when she had done with strangeness and loneliness for ever—when she was Edward's wife? It was only because she knew nothing of the world he had lived in, only because she had so little acquaintance with the incidents of his past life, that now, when they were away from the only place with which she was familiar, they seemed to have no subjects or conversation in common, and there was a distracting kind of newness in all their topics and surroundings. Perhaps it was also because she

was so isolated an individual ; she had no family stories to tell ; there was no taking on of fresh interests, no adding to the ties and charities of life, and her husband seemed to have no curiosity about her. She could not recall a question of his relative to the many things which, when two lives become united and merged for ever, are naturally of interest. However this might be, Janet, true as steel to the lofty love and the stainless faith that were in her, the life of her life, put the intrusive feeling from her with all her might ; he loved her, he had chosen her, she was his wife. Was there not the fulness of joy, of content, of blessedness, of companionship, of home, in fact? What right had she to admit a misgiving, to listen to a suggestion of want or incompleteness in her life? It would be treason to him, and utter ingratitude, if she did so, and she would not—no, she would not.

But steadfast and strong as her will was, there was something stronger still, and it was that incomprehensible barrier which existed between herself and her husband. She felt at times as though it were something which she was striving to tear down with her hands, a prison wall closing upon her ; the realisation of the ghastly story of the woman who sat bound while the workmen reared the vault around her, and it rose, layer of stone by layer of stone, from her fettered feet to her shrinking eyes. And this when she had been his wife for but two short months, while the friends who loved her were thinking of her happiness in its first bloom of romance, and the external circumstances of her lot had not a flaw in all their harmonious order. What was it that came like a nightmare to sweet sleep, and spoiled it all? Janet was not merely learning the ordinary lesson of human experience, that the worship of a human being is idolatry, and involves the certain penalty of that sin—a penalty which is generally speedy as well as sure. No ; there was something more.

Never had that sense of loneliness and strangeness come so strongly to her as on this day, from which of all days it surely ought to have been banished. She was back again in the dear home of the past, and it was her own, the gift

to her of the husband she loved; it was to be the scene of their future, the sphere of all her duties, of all her joys, of such sorrows as might be in store for her, hidden for the present. She ought to be happy, she would be happy, she must be happy.

But Janet was only gay, and that by an effort which Dunstan, had he been thinking at all about her, could not have failed to perceive. She talked more than usual, and sang not quite so well, pleaded fatigue as an excuse for the failure of her voice, and left him early.

A note from Amabel Ainslie lay on Janet's toilet-table, and she took it up eagerly; as if in it she were to find that true welcome home which somehow she had missed. It was an affectionate little missive, and it did Janet good. Strange that she should feel the need of it when all things seemed to be at their very best. Strange that when she stood gazing from the window of the familiar room, over the familiar scene, serene and beautiful in the moonlight, that restless question which haunted her rose from her heart to her lips, and she asked herself aloud: "What is it? What is it?"

CHAPTER XXXII.

ON THE STONE TERRACE.

Much animation prevailed at Bevis after the arrival of Captain and Mrs. Dunstan, and the fine spring weather facilitated the visiting which was to be expected under the circumstances. Mrs. Drummond had lived in such retirement that many of Janet's neighbours had not made acquaintance with her in the old times, but saw her first as the lady of Bevis. She made a favourable impression upon all these persons; they pronounced her to be handsome and attractive, a little absent in manner, and singularly quiet, which was not to be wondered at in the case of a girl who had lived entirely with old people, and had not yet had time to feel her own freedom and importance. Captain Dunstan was already popular, as, indeed, he deserved to be, for his tastes were sportsmanlike, his manners were good, his prejudices were few, and his political opinions were

neutral-tinted. He might be said to possess almost every requisite for the winning of general favour; and to be free from the angles that are knocked against by others, in the case of the best-intentioned individuals.

On two points there was absolute uniformity of opinion. The first was Janet's dress. This was the subject of general commendation. The second point was the demeanour of the young couple. This was pronounced to be perfect; no nonsense about it, though theirs was well known to have been a love match, but the pleasantest attention to everybody, and just what there ought to be to each other.

That Bevis was not to be forsaken for London by its owners until late in the season, when they were to go to town for a few weeks, was also taken well by the neighbourhood. Janet had been over-tired in Paris, and, as Amabel discerned, rather bewildered than pleased. It would, however, be more correct to say that she was at first pleased, and then bewildered; for the latter condition set in when the restless questions began to put themselves ceaselessly to her: what was it that had come between her husband and herself; what was it that had changed the glory of her noonday into twilight? Whence came this intangible, indescribable alteration which she felt in every nerve, with every heartbeat, from which she could no more turn her thoughts than she could keep her eye from seeing the objects before, or her ears from hearing the sounds around them?

Thenceforth she had been beset by the confusion which comes of trying to listen to two sounds at once, or rather of trying to hear the one, and to shut out the other, which will not be excluded. Then the splendours of art and the associations of history, the beauty of the fair city, the novelty of society and movement, lost their attraction for her and over her, and great weariness took possession of her. She strove against them, she especially strove to conceal any of their symptoms from Dunstan; following out the programme of each day as he arranged it with unquestioning acquiescence, but losing day by day all interest in the scene around her, and gradually yielding to a great longing to be back again at Bevis, and a great shrinking from the idea of London.

When they should be at Bevis, among all the familiar objects, in the scene of their daily duties, she must surely come to understand him better, and learn how to please him; she would be undisturbed in that study there. As if she ever rested from it! So that, when Dunstan told her he did not care for going up to London until near the end of the season, she was perfectly well pleased, and would have given much to tell him that she would not wish for anything other—better there could not be—than to remain always at Bevis with him. She did not tell him so, however; she had never got into the way of saying out to him what there was in her heart; and that which had been difficult before, the inexplicable something soon rendered impossible.

There was coming to Janet, through the secret source of her inexplicable suffering, a fault from which she had hitherto been singularly free—the fault of self-consciousness. A blight, to be seen and felt by herself alone, had fallen upon her; and she sought for its origin until she became occupied with herself to a degree which would have been impossible to the Janet of the past, the Janet whose heart, though irrevocably given away, was free from self, and full of service, and her spirit chainless and lofty. A change was passing upon these qualities of her fine nature; the shadow of the eclipse of her faith and hope. She was constantly thinking about her own looks, her own dress, her own manner; the effect she produced, and the attitude of her husband's mind towards her.

Janet, who had been accustomed to the knowledge that her face was fair, just as she had been accustomed to the knowledge that twenty-four hours made the day and night, but to concern herself no more about the one fact than the other, took to thinking about her looks! She would gaze wistfully into the glass, comparing the face that looked back at her to-day with that which she had seen yesterday, and dreading lest the answer to the haunting question might be found in the reflection there. She was wrong in that surmise; her husband still admired her quite as much as when her beauty had first taken him by surprise;

more, indeed, perhaps, now that it was fittingly adorned with rich attire. Only he did not think about her fair face any more than he thought about the other familiar objects which beautified the scene of his daily life.

Janet, who had never given a thought to her personal adornment beyond that intuitive regard to appropriateness which is inseparable from the habits of a gentlewoman, took to thinking about clothes. She studied the dress of other women, she observed the vagaries of fashion, she wondered whether it could be that she offended her husband's fastidious taste by making unconscious blunders in an art of which she was so ignorant. She was again wrong in that surmise; she had good taste in dress, and Dunstan recognised it. Only he did not observe her dress, and when she again wore a particular gown or a jewel because he had once chanced to notice it, he did not see that she was wearing the gown or the jewel.

Janet, to whom a serene unembarrassed bearing, as free from affectation as it was free from boldness, was as natural as breathing, began to think about her manners! Had something awkward in her, something unlike the ways and the tone of the "world" in which he had always lived, something which betrayed her want of skill and custom, annoyed her husband, chilled and humiliated him, against his will, perhaps hardly with his knowledge? Janet had read of such things in novels, limited as her acquaintance with fiction was; and in her secret soul she regarded herself, in comparison with Dunstan, as the "beggar maid" in comparison with the king who married her; for on the side on which Janet was humble, her humility was thorough.

There was a side on which she was proud, with a thoroughness of pride in which there might be a terrible power for evil; but she knew nothing of that in herself when she took to studying herself, and, among other baseless fancies, pondered whether her manners were not unconsciously provincial and distressing to Dunstan. Again she was altogether wrong. Her frankness, her gentleness, and her quick intelligence were all blended and expressed

in Janet's "ways," and her husband had never found a fault with her.

Had she been able to make up her mind which was the "style" admired by Dunstan among the varieties which her sojourn in Paris enabled her to observe, and set about imitating it, he might have noticed the imitation, but, also, he might not. He did not notice her "ways," he had not observed that she had gained confidence by her intercourse with the world, without losing in sweetness and simplicity; he marked no change in her. He did not love her; she did not interest him. He knew she was handsome and good; he would always behave well to her, he would take care she had everything she wanted; she was all he could wish for as a wife, but she was not the one woman he did wish for; that, however, was not her fault, nor his, but the fault of Fate; and sometimes he did not mind it very much, while at others he wished he was dead.

To the outer world not the smallest indication of the state of feeling of either the one or the other was given; the surface of these two lives was perfectly smooth. And, as for the question that haunted Janet, what was it but "a sentimental grievance" after all, and we know that a sentimental grievance, though it may divide nation against nation for successive centuries, and condemn races to comparative poverty and obscurity, is not worthy of consideration by practical people.

To the two persons who really knew her well, and whose interest in her went far beyond that of the people who saw everything at Bevis in the rosiest of rose-colour—to Mrs. Cathcart and Amabel Ainslie—there was something not quite satisfactory about Janet's looks and ways. The Vicar's impression was confirmed by the observation of his wife; the expression of Janet's countenance was changed; and she looked, now absent and again anxious, as she had not looked in the old time. Mrs. Cathcart thought it was the responsibility of her new position, knowing that Janet was not one to take anything of the kind lightly, and feeling that she herself should genuinely hate a big place and a large establishment; but, whatever might be the cause of

it, the alteration was there, unmistakable by anybody who knew Janet so well as she did. But that Janet's relations with her husband were anything but perfect, never occurred to her friend. It could not, indeed, have occurred to any one, for Captain Dunstan's demeanour to his wife was just the same as it had been during their brief engagement, and who was to guess that they had so little to say when they were left to themselves?

Mrs. Cathcart was vexed with Janet's indifferent way of answering her questions about Paris; Janet was getting a little spoilt, and inclined to fine-ladyism. But her apathy in regard to the delights of Paris did not strike Mrs. Cathcart so unpleasantly as her absent-mindedness when things of nearer interest and import were in question; she actually seemed like a person trying to listen to two speakers at once when the Vicar was telling her about the new arrangements for the choir-practising, and the Vicar's wife had the properest sense of the laches involved in inattention to the Vicar.

Amabel Ainslie saw the change in Janet as quickly as Mrs. Cathcart, but she viewed it differently, and thought over it with apprehension. Janet had not said one word to her of anything but content, and Amabel felt certain that she never would; but Amabel unhesitatingly assured herself that Janet was not happy.

"It is his fault," she said to herself; "it is his fault. I cannot guess, and I shall never know from her, but there is something wrong. No one but he could make her unhappy, now that she is his wife; her worship of him is such that no one else in the world can do her real good or harm. It is he! But what can it be? He seems, he is, so nice—a little too perfectly polite for my fancy, but then that is a matter of fancy, and very few people would agree with me—but it is plain he does not know much about her tastes and ideas. He looked so absent when I asked him what he thought of her songs—I don't believe he knew she ever composed one! Ah! Janet, Janet, I hope you have not married the wrong man."

On the joyful occasion of the visit of the old ladies from

Bury House to Bevis—where they arrived in the smartest carriage that Mr. Jones of the "Bell Inn" could turn out—Janet was more nearly happy than she had been for some time. For it had come to that; she had to persuade herself that she was happy; she had to silence the haunting voice by a strong effort of her will. What had become of the golden radiance which had shone all around her?—where was the dream-world of bliss? The radiance had faded, the dream-world had vanished, quite noiselessly, with no shock, no threat, but only the lightless void remained after the one, the chill of awakening after the other.

On that day, however, it was almost as though the former glow, the old vision, were there again, for Janet saw that her husband was thoroughly pleased, and that he exerted himself to please. How kind, courteous, and attentive he was to the Misses Sandilands; how ready to echo all their delighted comments on Janet's good looks; how quick to prevent her being embarrassed by their eager and unsuspecting inquiries respecting Sir Wilfrid Esdaile; how ready to assist her in showing them the house and gardens; how kindly interested in all they had to tell of their nephew and his prospects! After all, this could only be a proof of his love for her, leading him to be careful for those who had befriended her. She would try to remember this, to hold it in her mind when the spectre rose and the voice haunted; to remember, above all, that he had chosen her; she, who had not an advantage of any kind to inspire any motive except love. No, she must be mistaken; some dreadful temptation was at work within her.

Thus Janet pleaded her own cause with her own self, while the old ladies were walking, in wondering admiration, through the long line of succession-houses, surveying the beautiful prospect from the terrace, giving Mrs. Manners infinite credit for the preservation in which the venerable furniture was kept, and admiring the fitting-up of Janet's rooms. The piano and the books which were Mrs. Drummond's gift had been sent back to Bevis from Bury House, and now occupied their former places. Wider experience and more fastidious taste than those of the old ladies

might have pronounced Janet's home beautiful, and all that could be desired.

"You will let Julia come to us soon, will you not?" Janet said to Miss Susan, when the visit was drawing to a close. "You know she disappointed me before, and she must make it up to me now."

"Whenever you like, my dear Janet," was Miss Susan's reply. "We shall be glad that she should have so great a pleasure; and, indeed, she must want some pleasant society, some happy faces to raise her spirits, after the painful scenes she has gone through."

"True. I have not heard particulars, but it must have been very trying for Julia."

"Of course you have not heard particulars, my dear. I should have been surprised had Julia told you all that sad story, at a time when the remembrance of them ought to be put away, if there ever can be such a time in the life of human beings liable to death and sorrow. And I am not going to talk to you about it now, or to let you think about it."

"She was very young, and very happy," said Janet, not heeding Miss Susan's protest, "and it all came to an end in a moment. How dreadful!"

"Not all, my dear. We must not say all. It is a terrible bereavement, but poor Mrs. Thornton has many blessings left."

"Blessings! and her husband gone! What blessings can there be to her without him?"

"Parents and friends," said Miss Susan, seriously; "health, youth, fortune; and then, you know, or perhaps you may not have heard, she has her child to look forward to—a great consolation, and a tie to life, however great her trouble."

"Do you think so?" said Janet absently, almost as if she were talking to herself. "I cannot imagine there being any consolation for such a loss; I cannot believe in any tie to life when that one is broken which must be all or nothing."

With great tenderness in her sweet old face, Miss Susan laid her shrivelled palm on Janet's soft white hand, as she said in a low voice:

"It is just like you to feel like that; but you are only a wife as yet, my dear."

Captain Dunstan had been talking to the elder sister while these sentences were exchanged between Janet and Miss Susan, but Janet, raising her eyes as the last was spoken, saw a look of disturbance in his face which set her heart beating fast and heavily, with the vague dread that she had displeased him. The look passed in a moment, but it had stayed long enough to overcast all the calm and gladness she had been feeling. Presently the old ladies drove away in state, perfectly happy, and much delighted with their visit; and Janet and her husband, who had accompanied them to the carriage, returned into the house. She was making up her mind to ask how she had offended him, whether it was the sentiment she had expressed, or the fact of her uttering it—a fault, it might be, in the world's code of manners—which had disturbed him, when he took up his hat and said, as if nothing had occurred to trouble him:

"I have to speak to the Vicar on some business, and I shall just catch him if I go now."

The spectre rose more plainly than ever before Janet, the haunting voice pressed its question with more intolerable iteration. What was it that was setting them apart, and was he resolved that she should not ask him? But Janet had not offended Dunstan; the disturbance in his face had been caused by no words of hers; and now, as he walked in the direction of the Vicarage, but not with any purpose of seeing the Vicar, he was not thinking of her at all. He had heard what Miss Susan said about Laura, and the spectre of his lost happiness was summoned up by her words, with its ghostly utterance: "Too late! too late!"

On the day after Julia Carmichael's arrival at Bevis, she and Janet went to the Vicarage; but Janet only remained with Mrs. Cathcart, Julia returning to the house to write her letters. That day Janet was not looking well, and she did not deny that she felt ill. "At least, not exactly ill," she explained; "but what Edward calls 'moped,' and therefore I am especially glad Julia has come; she is so pleasant and amusing." Mrs. Cathcart had an afternoon engagement which made it impossible for her to walk home with Janet, and she took leave of her at the little gate in

the park wall, of which each possessed a key. Mrs. Cathcart lingered for a few minutes on her own side of the gate, watching the tall, slender figure moving onward under the branches of the great elms, and noting, as she had often noted before, its grace and steadiness. When she had reached a point in the avenue which they called the "dip," Janet turned, waved her handkerchief in farewell, and disappeared. Mrs. Cathcart returned to the house, wishing Janet were quite well, and not "moped," and hoping that nice Julia would do her good. It would be a great pity, she reflected, if delicate health were to mar the perfection of the arrangement for which Mrs. Drummond had schemed by securing the residence of her heir at his estate for those three important months. And then she dropped that thread of thought, never to resume it in all her life again.

Janet walked on under the branches of the great elms, more and more slowly as she neared the upper end of the stately avenue where the shrubberies commenced. Passing through a portion of these she could gain a small flight of steps leading to the stone terrace. This was the shortest way to the house, and she was glad it was not longer, for a distressing sense of exhaustion had come over her, and her sight was dim. Once or twice her steps grew uncertain, and she felt as she remembered to have felt when Sir Wilfrid Esdaile told her the story it so much grieved her to hear in the grounds at The Chantry. She got through the shrubbery, hardly conscious of her movements, ascended the little flight of steps, and found herself on the terrace, within a few yards of the windows of the library, which were open. A garden-bench was set against the wall of the house close beside the window nearest to her; in front of it paced Argus, the peacock, "high and disposedly." She saw a flash of colour as the tame bird's tail swept her dress, then saw no more, put her hand out, caught hold of the bench, and sank down upon it, senseless.

When Janet recovered consciousness, and the first vagueness of a swoon passed off, to be succeeded by the weakness that holds the whole body fettered, she remained half sitting, half lying, but motionless. She could not speak,

she could not lift her head or raise her eyelids. One arm hung over the rail of the bench, and so kept her balanced; she tried to move the other, but she could not. Presently the sound of voices came to her ear, distinct, and close by. Two persons who must have been within two or three feet of her, and just inside the window-sill, were talking in earnest tones. They were Julia and Dunstan; and Janet, motionless, speechless, spell-bound, heard every word they said.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A STATEMENT BY JULIA CARMICHAEL.

THE following is an exact statement of the circumstances that occurred during my stay at Bevis. I set them down here in the order in which they took place. It is a relief to my mind to recapitulate them thus carefully for John's reading, as by doing so I shall be able to reduce my responsibility, in a matter which is of pressing and painful importance to me and others, to its true proportions, instead of being, as I sometimes am, oppressed by a terrible misgiving that it was all my fault.

"I arrived at Bury House at the beginning of the second week in May, and a week later I went, at the invitation of Mrs. Dunstan, to Bevis. I looked forward with great pleasure to this visit, and previous circumstances had invested the occasion with an interest which led me to regard Janet with close observation. She received me with the utmost kindness, and, during the short time that we were together on the first day, I did not notice any symptoms of ill-health or unhappiness about her. It was late in the afternoon when I arrived at Bevis; there was not much time before dinner; some people dined there that day, and it was not until the following morning at breakfast that I was struck with a change in her appearance. She was looking handsome, I thought, but not strong, and her dispirited and restrained manner impressed me painfully. I learned from something said at breakfast that Captain Dunstan was to dine out on that day. It was arranged that Janet and I should walk down to the Vicarage after luncheon. When Captain Dun-

stan left us I asked her whether she was feeling well, and she said not quite, but a walk would do her good. She then proposed to show me the house and gardens.

"I ought to record in this place that neither in her demeanour or in that of Captain Dunstan was there a trace of disagreement or disunion. There was, however, a decided change in her, and I could not help wondering whether he was aware of this. I dwell on my perception of the change, because I was led by it into saying what I did afterwards say to him. The house interested me, and Janet told me all about the former disposition of it, in Mrs. Drummond's time. She was cheerful, but not elated, as I should have expected her to be, and she said little respecting herself or her own feelings. She left me to attend to some matters connected with her intended call at the Vicarage, and, after luncheon, Janet and I left Captain Dunstan and set out together for the Vicarage. Before leaving the dining-room I chanced to say that I must write some letters before post-hour, and Captain Dunstan invited me to use the library for that purpose, adding that I need not mind about post-hour, as he was going to Bury, and would take my letters.

"We took the private way through the park, along the avenue of elms, and Janet talked a good deal, not of herself or her position, but of my prospects, and of my cousin, Mrs. Thornton. Although Laura had formerly been a frequent subject of conversation between us, I would not have spoken of her now, had not Janet done so, because I took it for granted that Captain Dunstan had told his wife of the circumstances in the past connected with himself and Laura, and that it was just possible she might feel some reluctance or awkwardness about the mention of her. However, Janet introduced the subject, and after a little I perceived, to my great embarrassment and regret, that she was not aware that her husband and Mrs. Thornton were even acquainted. This was unaccountable, but an instant's reflection showed me that, whatever Captain Dunstan's reason might be, it was not my business to reveal to his wife what he had concealed from her, and therefore I said nothing on the point. Janet questioned me closely about

Laura, and spoke with her usual kind feeling of Mr. Thornton's death.

"Mrs. Cathcart was expecting us; nothing particular happened while I remained, but that was for a short time only. I left Janet with Mrs. Cathcart, and returned alone to the house by the same way. I went to the library, and began to write my letters. The weather was very fine, and the French windows, giving like doors upon the terrace, were open. A table was set ready for my use close to one of the windows, and I had been writing for more than an hour, when Captain Dunstan crossed the terrace from the garden side, and asked me whether he might come in for a few minutes' talk with me. I was a little surprised, but I said, 'Yes,' I had written all my letters, and they were ready for him.

"I could not tell how it was that he began to speak of Laura. I had almost made up my mind to say something to him, if opportunity offered, about the awkwardness to myself of Mrs. Dunstan's being unaware that he and my cousin were acquainted; but, when he abruptly introduced the subject, I was taken aback. I impute to my being confused, and to his perceiving it, the unfortunate conversation that ensued, for I have no doubt his first intention was merely to question me about the sad event which had taken place at Nice, and that he did not know I had any reason to believe him especially interested in Laura. He looked so strangely at me that I had to attempt to explain the confusion into which a very natural-seeming question had thrown me, and I said something to the effect that it would have been better if this subject had been openly talked of before Mrs. Dunstan.

"I have no apology to offer, either on his part or my own, for the revelation that followed; my business is to narrate, not to excuse it. Perhaps it would not have been excusable under any circumstances—at all events, it was inevitable; and, for the fault of it, he and I are both suffering, and also another, who had no part in that fault.

"I learned from Captain Dunstan that he had never ceased to love my cousin Laura. Plainly stated, there is the truth; but it is indispensable that I should here record

that he acknowledged it with vehement emotion. I had but lately left Laura, he said, and it was so long since he had heard of her. I had never before seen Captain Dunstan under the influence of any strong feeling, and I was surprised and shocked. He found I was aware that he had seen Laura once since her marriage, and he protested that he had tried hard since then to forgive her treachery to him, and even to forget her. He recapitulated their brief love-story, telling me much that I had not previously known, and dwelling upon the hardness of his destiny in having the fatal decision of Admiral Drummond against him reversed too late. He referred to my meeting with him in Paris, on my way to Nice, and spoke of his feelings in a manner which distressed me very much, dwelling upon the pursuing destiny that had divided him from Laura. Here it becomes necessary that I should repeat, as exactly as I can, the words which were said.

"'You little know that you then told me I had again lost her. It *was* hard, was it not? The first time she would not wait for me; the second time I had not waited for her!'

"'Hush! hush! For heaven's sake think of what you are saying! Why do you say such things to me, to yourself?'

"'I don't know; I can't tell; something stronger than myself makes me do it. You say she has never spoken of me all this time—never mentioned me. Does she think I do not care for her sorrow?'

"'Indeed she does not, believe me; but she remembers nobody, thinks of nothing except the loss she has sustained.'

"'I suppose so; no doubt you are right. And so it ought to be. Living and dead, Thornton is the winner.'

"'What a dreadful state of mind you have let yourself fall into!' And then I added, by an irresistible impulse, 'What, in heaven's name, induced you to marry poor Janet?'

"'Ah! what?' Captain Dunstan moved from the place where he had been standing, and, leaning against the window-jamb, spoke very distinctly. 'You think I was wrong to marry her?'

"'I think you were cruel and false to her, and very

foolish. You did not love her; you knew she loved you. Did you marry her for the sake of pity?'

"'No, Miss Carmichael, I married her for the sake of gratitude.'

"'Gratitude!'

"'Yes. What has driven me to speak to you I don't know; but as I have done so, I will be thorough; I will tell you all about it. Nothing can come of my telling you, there's nothing to hope for from that, or from anything; but I will tell you all the same. You are right: I *did* know that Janet loved me; I had it from the very best authority; and I owed to her the possession of Bevis. It was no fault of hers that the good was taken out of it: and her love for me enabled me to make her the only possible return. If Laura had waited for me I should have never known that I had incurred a debt of gratitude to Janet, which it is true I could not pay in love, but which shall be faithfully discharged, so help me God! It was she who, by refusing the inheritance for herself, made me master of Bevis, and, though I had no heart to give her, I could restore her to her home, secure her position in the world, and make her happy. That Mrs. Drummond wished me to marry Janet, I knew from Mrs. Drummond herself, and it has turned out very well. Janet, who deserves to be happy, for she is good, is happy as my wife, and I—I am—— Well, we will say nothing about that. I cannot say what has made me tell all this to you. I have, of course, been wishing to hear the particulars which you have told me, and intending to ask you for them, but I never meant to betray myself in this way, and it will not be easy for you to forgive me.'

"'That is nothing; but it is not easy to forgive what you have done to her. Oh, Captain Dunstan, how could you be so cruel or so stupid? What is the estate you owe to her, as you tell me, in comparison with the heart she has given you to be broken?'

"'Broken? And why? You don't take me, I hope, for a man who could visit his own disappointment on a woman who is not only blameless, but all that is excellent—too faultless, indeed? I dare say you hate me, Miss

Carmichael, but you need not despise me unnecessarily. Janet is safe with me, I assure you. Your own observation might tell you that. I do not think she has an ungratified wish, an unconsulted taste; if she has, it is her own fault, certainly not mine.'

"'You are trying to justify what cannot be justified. You have taken the pure gold of a perfect love from her, and given her false coin in exchange.'

"'You are talking—I suppose I must not say nonsense, but, at all events, like a romantic girl. Janet will never be unhappy, I hope; she never shall be, if I can prevent it. I dare say, if Thornton had not died, I should not have regretted my marriage for my own sake; but I never thought of such a thing; and it completely overset me. What I now have before me is to do my very best, so that I shall never have to regret it for Janet's sake.'

"I need not repeat what I answered to this; it did not affect events; I need only set down that I said what was in my heart, urging upon him that the only hope, the only chance of safety for Janet's peace and their joint future was, not only the concealment of the passion which he guiltily cherished in his heart, but its eradication. I don't know what I said, where the words came from to me; I was all the time a prey to bewildering distress and pity. Captain Dunstan listened to me patiently, becoming calm and like himself again while I was speaking; and when I paused he said, in his usual tone:

"'If I make no answer to all you say, it is not because I disregard it; it is because I am a man, and you are a woman, and you don't understand. We must never speak of this again; it must be like a dream to both of us. Let me only say that I count upon your friendship for Janet, and that, however mad and foolish my conduct of to-day may lead you to believe me, you need not fear for her.'

"He took up my letters and left the room by the door which opened into the entrance-hall, leaving me overwhelmed with distress and perplexity I sat there I don't know how long, hardly able to bring my thoughts into any sort of arrangement, and chiefly conscious of the wish to get away

from Bevis as soon as possible. With what pleasure I had come thither, as a complete contrast to the scenes through which I had recently passed, and how strange a connection had established itself between them! It would be impossible for me to remain; I could not hold so anomalous a position; besides, when the strange mood that had prompted Captain Dunstan's unsought and unwelcome confidence should have passed away, I, of all persons in the world, would be the least pleasing in his sight. It was impossible that he should ever feel at ease with me again. I had to devise some excuse for going away, which should excite no suspicion in Janet's mind, however unlikely it might be that suspicion should arise.

"Time passed; the evening drew on. I heard the sound of carriage wheels, and knew that Captain Dunstan had left the house. Still Janet did not come to look for me in the library, and I remained there, glad of every minute's delay before seeing her again. I remained after the room had been lighted, and until it was time to dress for dinner, and still Janet did not come to look for me.

"At length I went upstairs, and passing by the end of the admiral's corridor, on my way to my own room, I observed Janet's maid stooping down and apparently listening at the door of her mistress's room. She perceived me, and said:

"'The door is locked, and Mrs. Dunstan does not speak. I have knocked several times. I am afraid she is ill.'

"'Mrs. Dunstan has not come in,' I answered, 'I left her at the Vicarage.'

"Janet had, however, come in. The door was locked on the inside, and also the door of the dressing-room which communicated with Janet's own sitting-room, and in the latter we found the hat, gloves, and shawl she had worn that afternoon. We rattled the handle of the door, and called to her several times without effect; but, just as I was becoming seriously alarmed, the key turned, and Janet appeared, showing us a face so ghastly that her maid uttered an exclamation. She was wrapped in a white dressing-gown, and her hair was loose; her eyes were dim and contracted, her face was ashy pale, except for one burning red

spot upon each cheek-bone; her lips were livid, and she was shivering. I shall never forget the white figure in the doorway, against the dimness behind her, facing the lights of the bright, pretty sitting-room.

"'Janet, what is the matter? Are you ill?'

"'I am afraid I am. I have been lying down.'

"She spoke faintly, with a pause between each word and the next, and in a voice unlike her own. Those were the last coherent words she addressed to any one for many days to come. Dr. Andrews was in the house when Captain Dunstan came home late that night, and she was then quiet, but it was the first of many nights of watching and anxiety, during which her mind and her speech were not occupied with actual things, or with us who were about her, at all.

"Dr. Andrews was of opinion that the illness had not come so suddenly as we supposed; and Mrs. Cathcart told us that Janet was not looking well when she was at the Vicarage in the afternoon. In answer to the doctor's minute inquiries, no one could tell him anything of the interval between Janet's leaving Mrs. Cathcart and the moment at which her maid and I ascertained the fact of her illness; no one had seen her come into the house, and Captain Dunstan, supposing that she was with me in the library, and being rather late for his dinner engagement, had not looked for her before he went out.

"On the dreary days which followed I need not dwell. They had this effect on me, personally, that they removed every shade of embarrassment from between myself and Captain Dunstan. There were times when I hardly recalled what had passed, so intently was my mind set upon the hand to hand, foot to foot, inch by inch fight in which she and we were engaged with the insidious and terrible foe that had stricken her. I pass on to the time when she began to recover. Then, her mind being clear, though weak and passive, I especially observed two things; the first, that she was sensibly distressed by Captain Dunstan's presence; the second, that she was better, more restful, and more refreshed when Amabel Ainslie was with her. She would smile faintly when her husband entered the room, and

answer his inquiries gently, but she never asked him a question, and she never inquired for him in his absence.

"To me she was always gentle, and painfully grateful, but she would lie, or sit, for hours, holding Amabel's hand with her own eggshell-like fingers, speaking little, but listening to her friend's pleasant talk. Amabel read aloud to her occasionally, but I do not think Janet listened; she would keep her eyes closed all the time. She was at her best when Amabel was with her. The first wish of any kind that she expressed was that Captain Dunstan should go to London as he had proposed to do; and this she conveyed through Amabel. He went up to town, it being then late in June. She was exceedingly nervous when he was going away, and either by accident, or by her own contrivance, they were not alone for a moment. No allusion had been made by Captain Dunstan or myself to the events of the day on which Janet's illness commenced, and I now bade him farewell for an indefinite time, as I was to return to Hunsford the following week.

"From the hour of her husband's departure I observed a singular alteration in Janet. Her nervousness subsided, her absent manner changed, she gained strength daily; but a settled sadness took possession of her.

"On the day before that on which I was to leave Bevis two letters arrived; one was for me, the other was for Janet. The first announced, in Laura's own hand, the birth of Laura's son. She was at once a joyful and a sorrowful mother, and the few lines, in which I read both joy and sorrow, touched me nearly. The second announced, in an unknown hand, the death of Janet's sister-in-law, Mrs. Monro, at Nice. I was afraid of the effect that the intelligence might have upon Janet, but she took it very quietly. Amabel was with her for part of that day, and I heard Janet say to her: 'There is not now any one of kin to me in the whole world.'

"She talked to me more than usual, on the day before I was to leave her, of my future, and of John; but never of herself, and she made no mention of her husband. The oppressive consciousness that had revived in my own mind,

when the pressure of anxiety about her life and health was removed, prevented me from naming him. We bade each other an affectionate adieu, and I last saw Janet standing at the top of the great avenue in her deep mourning dress. She waved her hand to me, while I leaned from the carriage-window for a parting look.

"The remainder of what I have to set down here is but hearsay, therefore shall be brief.

"Two days after I left Bevis, Janet drove into Bury, and drew out of the bank the whole of the money standing in her name there. On the third, she told her maid that she was going to London, and would not require her to go with her, but would send her instructions afterwards. She then left Bevis, taking only a travelling-bag, and was driven to the post-office, where she got out of the carriage, and put a letter into the box with her own hand, thence to the railway-station, where she arrived just in time to take her place in the train.

"No instructions reached Janet's maid, no communication of any kind was made by Mrs. Dunstan to her household; and when, after several days had elapsed, Mrs. Manners wrote to Captain Dunstan, expressing the surprise and uneasiness which the silence of Mrs. Dunstan was occasioning at Bevis, her respectful remonstrance received a startling reply.

"So soon as it was possible for him to reach Bevis after the receipt of the housekeeper's letter, Captain Dunstan arrived, and it very shortly became known to the household that Mrs. Dunstan had not joined her husband in London. Nothing more was made known to them, except, indeed, that their mistress had incurred no blame of that kind which involves disgrace, by what she had done. 'Something between them that nobody knows anything about,' was the general supposition; 'but he respects her as much as ever, and if she never comes back it will be her fault, and not his.'

"In the centre compartment of the old bureau in Janet's dressing-room, where she habitually kept her keys, and which was unlocked, there was found a small parcel, addressed to Captain Dunstan. It contained a gold bracelet, set with cats' eyes, and a letter. Of the contents of that

letter only a few lines were ever made known to any one except Captain Dunstan himself, and with them only I am concerned here. The writer said that she was aware, if search were made for her, there would be little hope that she could elude it, being so unequally matched againt the resources of search; but she earnestly begged that none should be instituted. She asked this as the one only compensation that could be made to her. When his freedom should have been restored by her death, Captain Dunstan would be apprised of it; she would take order for that. For the interim, and for the rest, she implored peace.

"Captain Dunstan, whose distress and remorse were extreme, left no means untried to discover Janet, despite her prayer; but she had gained the start of inquiry, and all was unavailing. From no quarter could he obtain intelligence of her; the only friends she had, the old ladies at Bury House, were horror-stricken and absolutely ignorant; her only relative had died amongst strangers in a strange land.

"These are the facts that I have tried to record; of the feelings with which I set them down it would be equally vain and impossible for me to say anything."

CHAPTER XXXIV

ALL, OR NOTHING.

WOUNDED, she had fled! The instinct of the stricken creature who would fain hide from the herd was strong in Janet, and it was fostered by all the associations of her past, and fed by the qualities and the defects of her character. Many a woman not nearly so good as she, not so lofty, not so single-minded, would have better borne such a blow, would have seen the fair structure of her faith, her hope, her trust, and her happiness levelled to the earth by one fell stroke, and have turned her, after the first shock of the devastation, to the building up of some sort of shelter for her forlorn head out of the shattered fragments. Many a woman not so good as she, not so lofty, not so single-minded, would have applied the test of duty, and likewise the standard of expediency, to the position, and, with

whatever suffering, made up her mind to her fate. With Janet, no such thing could be. It would be impossible to tell what she suffered in the interval between the laying, by Dunstan's own words, of the haunting question that had pursued her after her marriage, in the deep grave of a dreadful certainty, and the merciful dropping of the veil of illness between her and external things. The agony of a score of deaths was in that uprooting of the foundations of her life, in the loneliness of a lost heart, cast out from the fire and food of love, to cold which could never abate its rigour, and hunger which might not cease to gnaw for evermore.

Her first coherent thought, when the numbness that had held her bound while the "lep'rous distilment" was poured into her ear gave way, and she could move, was that she must get away at once. While she lay upon the floor of her room, her face downwards on her hands, and when she dragged herself to the door, with a horror of confronting Julia in which there was the beginning of frenzy, her brain seemed to be turned into an anvil on which a hammer was beating, and the echo of every stroke said, "How? how?" When she emerged from the stupor of illness, it was with a clear recollection of all that had occurred, and to resume in undiminished weight the load that had been lifted from off her for the interval during which life and death were contending for the possession of her. She then experienced that sense which at one time or another comes to most of us—the sense of a dual existence in which there is no relation between the condition of the body and that of the mind. There she lay, calm and quiet, a model patient for quiescent answering to "treatment," gaining a little in convalescence each day, and all the time ruin and desolation were in her heart, and in her mind there was a fixed purpose, at utter variance with all that surrounded her. She used to feel glad in those days that she was so weak; she could have suffered more had she been stronger; but, as it was, she had many an interval of vagueness, in which the tired mind rested, many a doze of the thoughts, and although their wide-awake complexion never changed, there was relief in the sense of something deferred that came to her with those lapses.

Then, too, she was so closely watched, the tending of her was so faithful, that she was bound to absolute self-control, and this was well for her. Had anything been observed in her which was not readily to be accounted for by her illness, she would straightway have been questioned by Julia, or by Mrs. Cathcart, or perhaps Captain Dunstan himself; and from such a possibility she shrank with dread which would have impelled her to any amount of effort at concealment. Her very truth and loyalty were dangerous to her now, for they precluded her perception to be of a middle course, dictated by any thought for circumstances: they brought her face to face with her own belief and her own declaration that in the tie of marriage there must be found all, or nothing. She must get away; but how?

Janet had at times the strangest feeling as though he were dead, and this, when the spell of it was on her, did not yield to his presence. After she became able to observe what was passing around her—how much he had been with her during the worst of her illness she never asked or knew—she was aware that he came several times during the day to inquire how she was, to sit a while in her room, speaking softly with her attendants, or with Julia or Amabel—for either was almost always with her—but he spoke little to herself, and did not seem surprised at her silence.

At first the sight of him, and the sound of his voice, caused her such intense pain that she could conceal it only by a superhuman effort, and thence arose her habit of keeping her eyes closed while he was in the room, a habit which escaped notice, except by one person. Amabel observed those closed eyelids; she heard the sigh that accompanied the lifting of them when Captain Dunstan went away.

When several hours elapsed without her seeing him, Janet felt as though he were dead, or, more frequently, as if she herself were dead, and all that had happened was left behind in a world with which she had nothing henceforth to do, but whose shadowy memories pursued her with unrelenting urgency, and put her to unremitting pain. This was the more tranquil of the two moods between which she alternated, and it became less frequent as she grew stronger,

and drew nearer to health. The other mood was one of fierce and fiery suffering, in which the past mocked, the present tortured, and the future terrified her—one in which she recounted her own story to herself with all the bitterness of deadly jealousy, and all the sickening anguish of despair.

The past that mocked her was a past in which she had dreamt but one dream, cherished but one love—in which she might have been happy with her dream, with her love, asking for nothing beyond them. The friend who had filled her life with blessings had overthrown them all by one action. Janet did not know, or care to know, how it was that Mrs. Drummond had made that revelation to Dunstan which had been the ruin of the life she longed and purposed to bless; she did not know how her old friend had found out the secret of her love. From her heart arose the cry: "Oh, my dear one, how could you have done this to me? How could you, who know me so well, know me so little?" but there was not mingled with it any blame of Mrs. Drummond. She had read the girl's heart, and she had laid open the page before another reader; thus, with the best intentions, she had undone the work of her own years.

Very differently did Janet think of Dunstan. Against him there rose up in her heart at times a hot and bitter anger—such anger as can only co-exist with love, because its agony could have no more superficial source. He knew she loved him, and he married her out of "gratitude." The word was his own; he had made the avowal in her hearing. He had done this cruel thing, against which love, pride, dignity, and self-respect revolted equally. Because she had given him money, and he owed her "gratitude," he had taken herself. He had deceived her, he had sacrificed her to his own pride, to his sense of what he owed to himself. He had done this, because, the woman he had loved, being unattainable, it was comparatively easy for him to discharge his debt in this way.

Janet's proud heart was wrung by the agony of this thought. He had so little cared to understand her, that he had not felt he was doing her a deadly, unpardonable

wrong, though it were never to be revealed to her in this world—a wrong which every day they passed together, while she lived in the fool's paradise of a lie, intensified. He had thought to repay her for fortune by marriage—how had he proposed to repay her for love? What a base imitation was that which had indeed never quite deceived her, although she had not been able to define the doubt that had beset her!

What a pure and single-hearted devotion had hers been! With what humility and grateful joy she had loved him, regarding herself as the most fortunate of women, and resting in the belief that the love which had been his sole motive for marrying her, must, although it could not approach her own, be the strongest and the deepest of his feelings too! When the disappointment with which she had vainly struggled importuned her most, and the doubt which she vainly resisted made most head against her peace, she was wont to assure herself of this. He had married her because he had loved her; and if ever he was to regret it, the fault would be her own.

But now for Janet there was no more of this humble, deprecatory mood, which might have helped her much in the inevitable transition from an unrealizable ideal to the actualities of a very tolerable sort of life, that in the ordinary course lay before her. By becoming her husband, Dunstan had done her the only wrong for which she could find no plea in the heart which was so entirely his. The very unity of her nature made it impossible that she should regard that wrong in what others would call a reasonable light. She had been the victim of a sham from the first; it had all been nothing!

And now, unless she could conceal from him what she had learned, and get away without an explanation, she might have to endure remonstrance from him, persuasion, perhaps incredulous surprise; and this she could not bear. He had married her from "gratitude," without love, he had married her, loving another woman, and he would, probably, say to her that it was so, but that she should have no cause to complain of him—had he not said just that to

Julia!—that she must make the best of it; that married people, with good tempers, and good manners, and a good fortune, might get on very well together without romance. She had heard more than once some such treason and blasphemy as this spoken in the world of which she had had a glimpse, and she had revolted against it although it could not profane the sanctity of that love which was poor Janet's sole religion. To hear such treason and blasphemy from him would be more than she could endure; she must do anything rather than be forced to listen to it. He would try to keep her with him, no doubt, for the sake of appearances, out of consideration for the world he prized and deferred to, the world which she neither loved nor hated, but simply took into no account at all. He would not resort to unkind means, for Dunstan was essentially a gentleman, but his persuasion would torture her, and his reasoning would be the most terrible kind of folly to a woeful mind like hers. She did not doubt, however, that he would respect her sole request, that she might be left unmolested, when the thing was done and over, and the gulf was set between them. She never asked herself how she was to bear the separation from him, how the long, slow days would pass with her. It had all become impossible, it was all as though it had never been, save for the falsehood, and the ruin, and the pity of it. And there was no form or shape in the future for her; she was bent only on flight from the treason and betrayal of the past.

How the tenacity of her memory tormented her! She had taxed it but little, save with records of Dunstan, and it held them with scrupulous faith. She lived again through every hour of the time before the news of Mr. Thornton's death reached her husband, and now she knew it was from that moment the doubt which had haunted her had taken form. Then, trying to see clearly into a mental condition hardly comprehensible by her transparent truthfulness, she divined that the husband who had never loved her, whose debt of "gratitude" had unexpectedly become so irksome, because the barrier between himself and the woman whom he loved was removed, would surely come

to hate her. From that hour the image of Laura had been before him, not as the wife of another, parted from himself by her own act and choice, but forming the centre of a mocking picture of what might have been but for Janet's importunate love and his own disproportionate and untimely "gratitude." Thenceforth Janet's presence became an active evil; his wife was no longer the obligatory accompaniment of his position, she was the living obstacle to his happiness, the woman who stood between him and Laura.

Janet shrank with terror from the thought that he might come to hate her—after the polite fashion of household hatred among people of the world, no doubt, but with all that repulsion in it which his love of Laura would lend. He would come to hate her when he should see, beside her, the aerial image of the woman who, but for her, might have been his—the woman whose husband had been happy, and had loved her, and was dead!

Yes, he would hate her, and nothing that she could do could hinder that hatred; for she could not die. Until great suffering has come to the young, they are apt to flatter themselves that if it should come they will be sure to escape from it by death; but its first tight grip teaches them that it is not so. While Janet was very ill she had no memory of her sorrow, and when she awoke to it clearly, without transition, she knew that she was not going to die. Yes, he would hate her, for, while she lived, she represented the weapon of Fate wherewith he had been opposed and defeated. And she must bear that knowledge; but she need not be condemned to read it in his face, to hear it in his voice, to look at him with the knowledge that it was stirring at his heart. Freedom to him or to herself it was not in her power to give; but she could go far from him, and no word or sign from her should reach him more.

With her mind quite clear, and with her friends about her, Janet, living in a world apart from them, made her plans. Sometimes she wondered, in a vague way, that it did not grieve her to think of parting for ever with those friends: she loved them, she felt their solicitude and care; she knew that they would grieve when she was gone; but

she felt no trouble on that account. There was no room, there was no strength in Janet's heart for any divided sorrow.

Julia had been brave and truthful in what she said to Dunstan; she had at least a true woman's perception that for a man to marry from any other motive than love is a cruel deed, and an outrage to honour. Janet was grateful to Julia, and whenever she could divert her thoughts from their centre of pain, she liked to think of Julia as a happy wife. Julia would forget her, or, at least, she would cease to grieve about her.

And Amabel? It was otherwise with regard to her; numbed as were Janet's feelings, she was not insensible to that difference; she did not forget the promise she had made to Amabel, or how strangely Amabel had pressed her for a renewal of it on her fatal wedding-day Janet did not mean to be unfaithful to that promise. She knew that she might trust Amabel, no matter to what pain she should have to put her, and many an hour did she lie still, or sit in the deep, old-fashioned arm-chair by the window—holding the girl's hand in hers, and pondering upon the project which was to be put into execution when her strength returned, with a great pity and hope for Amabel in her heart.

"It will be hard on her at first," Janet would think, "but it will be well for her in the end. Sir Wilfrid will come back with Mr. Sandilands, and he will visit his friend when I am here no longer—no doubt he will blame me heavily, even if he knows all about the woman whom my husband loves, for men stand by men—and he will fall in love with Amabel this time. She will be happy with him; she will not fret about his passing fancy for me, for *she* will not have been deceived."

All this time Janet was unaware of the close scrutiny with which Amabel was observing her, and she little thought how nearly her curious gift of intuition was enabling her friend to discern her secret. "There is an arrow in her heart," Amabel said to herself early in Janet's convalescence, "and the hand that shot it is her husband's."

From that moment, without questioning her by so much as a look, she seconded Janet's wishes. As clearly as she

perceived Janet's state of mind, Amabel discerned that Janet's wish that he should go to London was welcomed by Captain Dunstan; something more than the gladness of a man to escape from a scene of dulness and illness, when things are on the mend, and he can take a holiday creditably.

When the intelligence of Mrs. Monro's death was sent to Janet, her friends were afraid of the effect that it might have upon her. She took it with composure, and Julia supposed she had so long looked for the event that she had grown accustomed to think of her sister-in-law as having passed away out of her own life for ever. But Amabel knew better; to her Janet said, briefly:

"She has her wish at last, and my brother has his; they are reunited. Shall I grudge that to them for my poor sake?"

There was no sorrow in Janet's heart for her sister-in-law; on the contrary, she thought of her with unselfish congratulation, with sinless envy. There was one in the deathless world whose heaven had been incomplete until she joined him there. To Janet the deathless world itself could never give that especial happiness throughout all eternity.

That night Janet took from a drawer in the old bureau a packet of letters. Among its contents were all those which Mrs. Monro had written to her since she left England. There were none of very recent date, but several of years ago. From the latter Janet selected a few, which she placed in a pocket of her travelling-bag; but from those which related to Mrs. Monro's sojourn at Nice she made some memoranda, and then she burned the letters.

Janet travelled to London by a train which enabled her to cross the Channel the same night. The steamer that carried her to Calais was the same in which she and Dunstan had crossed to Dover on their return to England. She recognised the stewardess, but felt absolutely secure from recognition herself, as well she might, for who could have seen in the pale-faced, sad-eyed young woman in mourning, her hair completely hidden by the white border of an English widow's cap, who sat in a corner of the cabin, with a leather bag at her feet, the beautiful, richly-dressed, assiduously waited-

on lady, whose servants had made such a fuss about the amount and quality of accommodation for her and themselves, and whose equipment included every accessory of travelling fashion.

Twenty-four hours after she left Bevis, Janet was seated in the *parloir* of a humble little convent in a remote quarter of Paris, where the surroundings are of a squalid order, but where high walls shut in and lofty trees shelter the quiet, unseen lives that are passed in teaching the children of the poorest among the poor, and succouring the aged sick. In a superior, but still humble, portion of the house, a few ladies resided as boarders, and Janet was waiting to learn whether she could be received among the number. Presently a mild, grave woman, in the dress of a religious, entered the room, holding in her hand a faded letter. It was one of those which Janet had put away in the corner of her travelling-bag. She bowed to Janet, addressed her in French:

"Our Reverend Mother remembers Madame Monro perfectly—that dear little widow who was here with us in her first days of great mourning—and she learns that madame is of her family and one dear to her. This letter is enough; our Reverend Mother will receive madame."

CHAPTER XXXV

A QUESTION OF IDENTITY.

A FEW weeks after the death of Mrs. Monro, Miss Wells, having hung up the key of her apartment in the bureau of the old hotel at Nice, set out in that independent fashion which she prized so highly on a sufficiently vague expedition. She needed change and recreation: the latest task of her self-appointed work had cost her a good deal, and, if she was to go on, she must not fret or look back, and, above all, she must take care of her own health. She meant to have a pleasant ramble among mountains somewhere, but first she would go to Paris for a few days. It was rather warm weather for Paris, but it was not Miss Wells' way to be influenced by considerations of that kind; she had something to do at Paris, and when it was done, she would begin to take her holiday.

As she journeyed up to the beautiful city in a crowded and stuffy train, Miss Wells arranged in her methodical mind all that she meant to do in Paris, and the order of it. First, business she had undertaken; then a visit to a certain hospital where she hoped to get some useful hints; a few hours at the Salon; a few minutes in two or three of the great churches; a few purchases at the Bon Marché; a drive in the Bois; and after all this she would be off to the mountains. She meant to go to an hotel in the Rue St. Honoré, and to set about her business early the next day.

"Barrière de la Glacière," said Miss Wells to herself, as she looked over some memoranda in her pocket-book. "I have not a notion where it is, but I dare say it will be a pleasant drive. And I am going on a pleasant errand. How glad they will be to get the money for their poor old people, and how pleased at Janet's remembrance of them! It was a fine act of hers, too; there is a great deal of self-denial in that hundred pounds."

Miss Wells' business in Paris was the fulfilment of a request made by Mrs. Monro shortly before her death. She had saved out of her small annuity, which died with her, one hundred pounds, and this sum she had confided to Miss Wells for a special purpose. She had no relative in the world except Mrs. Dunstan, and to her she wished a few of her personal effects to be sent; but the money she had saved she was free to dispose of, and it was to be given to the first friends whom she had found in her great trouble, by the hands of her last friend. Every other wish which she had expressed had been faithfully carried out by Miss Wells, who was now about to fulfil this one. She felt curious about this Mrs. Dunstan, who had taken no notice of her letter in which she had given the particulars of Mrs. Monro's death. The receipt of the articles sent to Bevis from Nice—not immediately after Mrs. Monro's death, but when Miss Wells became convinced that Mrs. Dunstan did not mean to write—had been formally notified by Captain Dunstan, but no other communication reached her. Even that dear, lovely Mrs. Thornton, who had been so fond of Mrs. Monro, had not written a line, and although she was

in such trouble herself, Miss Wells thought she might have done so ; indeed, her own trouble would but have been a reason the more. It was very strange, considering all that Mrs. Thornton and Mrs. Monro had gone through together, and Miss Wells felt a kind of retrospective pity for the loneliness of her dead friend, who was so little missed. She almost wondered that nice Miss Carmichael had not written, but she felt she must now put these things out of her head. She had, indeed, been particularly interested in a certain set of people who chanced to come in her way, but she was not going to be disappointed because they had soon forgotten her.

In this healthy frame of mind Miss Wells set out on her expedition to the distant region of Paris wherein her business lay

A *porte-cochère* in a lofty, dingy wall, with the gently-stirring boughs of some fine acacia-trees visible above it, admitted Miss Wells to a peaceful scene. Three sides of a large piece of ground, which combined the features of a lawn and a garden, were enclosed by the main building and the wings of a very old house, with a leaden roof, tall narrow windows, and a flagged verandah. A superb acacia-tree occupied the centre of the lawn, where two or three wicker chairs and a light table strewn with needlework indicated that the inmates of the house were wont to make a summer drawing-room of the smooth green sward.

There would be some delay before Miss Wells could see the person for whom she inquired, and, the lawn being vacant, she asked to be permitted to wait there in the cool air, rather than in the *parloir*. She took one of the wicker chairs and sat patiently under the shade of the great acacia, enjoying the stillness and seclusion of the place, in which no one seemed to be stirring, although there was plenty of busy life within those walls. She had been there perhaps a quarter of an hour, when the sweeping of a woman's dress upon the green sward caused her to turn her head. No doubt the person whom she expected to see was coming to her ; a low-lying branch hid the approaching figure, but she discerned a plain black skirt. The next moment the figure came from behind the tree into full view. A tall form,

clad in deep mourning; a fair, delicate, pale face, surrounded by a widow's bonnet, which hid the bright hair, revealed themselves to Miss Wells, who sprang up with an exclamation, and gazed at the lady with mingled fascination and recoil.

"I beg your pardon, I have disturbed you; I came for my work," said the lady, as she passed Miss Wells with a bow and approached the table. But Miss Wells, from whose florid face the colour had vanished, and who was trembling, made no conventional reply.

"For God's sake tell me who you are!"

No answer.

"Pray forgive me, I don't mean to be rude, but it is impossible—the likeness is so remarkable; I never saw such a thing, and she was very dear to me!"

"She! Whom?"

"Janet Monro."

As they had come to her that day at The Chantry, as they had come to her that other day upon the terrace at Bevis, so the ringing in her ears, the dull throbbing in her heart, came to Janet now, warning her. She caught at a chair and sank into it with a deep sigh, to the great alarm of Miss Wells.

"Ah! *mon Dieu*, is it that Madame Monro finds herself ill?"

This question was asked by the person whom Miss Wells had come to see—a kindly, middle-aged nun who had joined them unperceived.

"Madame Monro! Is that the name of this lady?"

"Yes, yes, this is Madame Monro. Ah, she is better; it is nothing. It is the heat, and she is not strong. See, she is quite revived. Pardon, madame, you wished to speak with me."

"I did; but is it well to leave this lady? Are you better?"

She addressed Janet in a solicitous but firm tone, which seldom failed to inspire confidence, and Janet opened her eyes, with a faint smile.

"I am quite well now. It was nothing, only the heat."

"Remain where you are," said the nun, "and when madame has told me her business, we will return to you. Poor little lady," she added, as she conducted Miss Wells to the parlour, "she has had her troubles, I fear, like all in

this sad world, but she is at peace here, and she comes to us recommended by an old friend."

They entered the house, and were hidden from Janet.

She was recovering from the shock of the words that had been spoken to her, but only to bewilderment and fear. Had her term of rest and peace come to an end? Who was this stranger, kindly-natured and good indeed, if her face and her voice might be trusted, who evidently held a clue by which she might trace Janet's identity? Supposing she were to use it, and, discovering her secret, consider that she ought to reveal it? Then what could come to Janet except the miserable dread that, from any of those motives which were so small and meaningless to her, her husband might disregard her prayer.

She tried to think that she was frightening herself for nothing: the stranger had come to the Reverend Mother on business of her own; she would forget the accidental likeness that had struck her so strongly in the claims of that business, and, seeing Janet no more, would think of her no more. Janet rose, with the intention of going away, but found she could not walk, or even stand steadily, for the ringing and the throbbing, and when she sat down again she could not think clearly. She must wait until somebody should help her back to her room.

Miss Wells acquitted herself of her commission, and was well rewarded by the gratitude of the Reverend Mother, who asked her many questions about the young widow who had cherished so lasting a remembrance of her sojourn in the little convent. It was strange, she said, except that the finger of the good God was to be seen in everything, if it were but looked for, that they were able just then to do something in memory of their benefactress. The poor little lady out there—the Reverend Mother pointed to the lawn—had come to them in the character of a relative of Mrs. Monro, asking them to receive her as a boarder for Mrs. Monro's sake, and they had done so.

"Indeed!" said Miss Wells, "and when was that?"

She had not mentioned the date of Mrs. Monro's death, and the Reverend Mother's answer that this relative of

Mrs. Monro's had been received at the convent within ten days after that event, led in a flood of light upon her.

"What was her precise relationship to Mrs. Monro?"

"She was her cousin, of the same name, too, as she tells me. She will be cheered when she learns this curious circumstance; and she needs cheering. She has no friends in Paris."

What had happened? Of Janet's identity Miss Wells had no doubt. The mysterious fact of Mrs. Dunstan's being where she was implied some great misfortune; and the recollection that the friend she had so lately lost had loved this only relative, stirred Miss Wells' heart.

At this moment the Reverend Mother was told that somebody else wanted to see her, and Miss Wells availed herself of the opportunity to return to the lawn, and, as she said, introduce herself to her countrywoman.

Janet was still sitting where they had left her, her head lay wearily against the back of the wicker chair, her hands lay idly in her lap; she was the very image of lassitude and hopelessness, far more sad to see than ever her namesake had been, even when she was fading most rapidly

Miss Wells went close up to her, and dealing promptly with the nervous apprehension in her grief-stricken face, said:

"I am Martha Wells; it was I who wrote to you from Nice. Janet Monro died with her hand in mine. Will you not trust me, Mrs. Dunstan?"

In England, as elsewhere, time was running on, and the first impression made by the events that had occurred at Bevis had passed away. Captain Dunstan had been solicitous only that it should be understood, in the fullest possible sense, that his wife was not to blame for the separation—which had soon become publicly known.

For this very reason Janet was all the more severely blamed; the most charitably-disposed supposing she must be mad, and that Captain Dunstan was hushing it up. At all events, it was plain that he felt the separation severely, and that there was an end to all the pleasant prospects of Bevis proving an "acquisition" to the neighbourhood.

Captain Dunstan did feel Janet's flight severely—as a terrible blow to his pride, and an extraordinary revelation of her character. Not only had he never suspected the existence of so exalted and impossible ideal in her mind as would render the knowledge of his motives for making her his wife intolerable to her, although she should be perfectly secure from lack of kindness and observance on his part; but he had never believed in feelings of the kind at all, out of a romance. Of course he knew she loved him; Mrs. Drummond told him so, and she herself had owned it in a very sweet and becoming manner when he proposed to her, and many times besides during their brief engagement, which he had found, to tell the truth, rather irksome. But that she should take things in this tragic way astonished him. It hurt him keenly, too, and made him think, as he had never thought before, of what the vows and the promises of marriage mean, how awful they are, how lightly taken and how ill kept, even when there is no open or defiant breach of the letter of them. He had always behaved well to Janet, and he did not doubt that he should have continued to do so; but he could not deny to himself that he had always been thinking of another woman, and that she had accused him truly, convicting him out of his own mouth, and left him—her interpretation of their respective positions being granted—with just cause.

It was more the manner of it than the action itself that he regretted so bitterly. Perhaps the unsuitability between them would, under any circumstances, have proved too great for comfort, but in that case a middle course might have been taken, one adopted by lots of people every day, without gossip, or the unpleasantness of this method of hers. He was seriously troubled about Janet, and oppressed by the fear that she might be suffering in material ways while her retreat remained undiscovered. Of course he should find her some day; he never doubted this; but in the meantime he was anxious it should not be suspected that he did not know what had become of her. And it was not suspected beyond the small circle of those who knew.

The shock and surprise of the desperate step his wife

had taken, and the success that attended her intention of concealing herself, had the effect of clearing his moral vision; and if it would have been a satisfaction to Janet, to know that she was perpetually in his remembrance, and an object of curiosity, a subject of questioning to him, such as she had never previously been, she might have had that satisfaction. It was as though he had married one woman, and his wife had turned out to be another just as she vanished from him; that other a less gentle, less perfect, less complaisant, more wilful being indeed, but more interesting, more individual. And yet, in the bottom of his heart, when Edward Dunstan mused upon the revelation of Janet's love, and what her ideal was, he thought—if only the right woman had loved him thus!

Events had also marched with time, and late in the autumn Julia Carmichael and John Sandilands were to be married. John had come home with Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, and the wedding was to take place at Hunsford. Dunstan and Esdaile had not met since Esdaile's return, but they were soon to meet, for Dunstan had asked Esdaile to come to Bevis after the wedding, and Esdaile had promised to do so. John Sandilands and Julia were also to visit him before they left England. It would be an awkward meeting, and Dunstan would be glad when it was over.

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile and Amabel Ainslie were the only guests at Hunsford in addition to the bridegroom. The wedding was a very quiet affair, both because the parties chiefly concerned wished it to be so, and on account of Laura, who had come from Scotland to be with her cousin on the occasion, and to take leave of her.

Lady Rosa Chumleigh was in an unprecedentedly amiable mood. She liked John Sandilands; she was very glad to get Julia disposed of, and, since things had been so comfortably settled by the birth of her grandson, she had been on unusually good terms with Providence. She was more disposed to let the Colonel approach to the realisation of his ideal—a quiet life—than she had ever been within his long but little varied experience. Julia looked well, and was very happy in her quiet way; and John Sandilands had a piece

of news to tell her when they had left Hunsford—it had been especially stipulated that he was not to tell her sooner —which would make her happier still.

Sir Wilfrid's wedding-present to his friend was a splendid one; it was the coffee plantation. John was going out to manage his own property now. Sir Wilfrid had hit upon this conclusive and satisfactory method of redressing, so far as might be the inequality between his own lot and that of John Sandilands that had always been a puzzle to him.

"Considering he has just married the only woman he ever wanted to marry, and that she is perfectly suited to him, I'm inclined to think the weight has got into the other scale now," said Sir Wilfrid to himself, ruefully, as he entered the house after he had speeded the happy pair on their way, and done a little good-natured pottering with the Colonel.

He found Laura in the morning-room with Amabel. The infant was sleeping in his lace-bedecked cradle beside the hearth, and Sir Wilfrid, having been indulged with a peep at him, began to talk with Laura, first of the wedding and of present matters, then of the past: of the dark days at Nice, of Julia's arrival, of their journey back to England, of the friends whom they left behind.

"If I had wanted reminding, which I certainly did not," said Sir Wilfrid, "I should have had all that time brought back to me by the sight of Miss Wells and Mrs. Monro."

"Miss Wells and Mrs. Monro?"

"Yes. I saw them for a moment only, at the railway station at Fontainebleau. As we went by, I put my head out of the carriage and waved my hat; but I can't tell whether they recognised me. Miss Wells looked the same; Mrs. Monro very wan and ill: it was only a glimpse, but I noticed that, I am sorry to say. What accounts do you get of her?"

He paused, and glanced from Laura to Amabel. The former was staring at him in unmitigated astonishment; the face of the other was suffused with a peculiarly vivid sample of what Amabel called her "unfortunate blush."

"What have I said?" asked Sir Wilfrid.

"That you saw Mrs. Monro with Miss Wells, on your way home with John. It is impossible."

"But I tell you I did see them; there is no doubt about it; I saw them as distinctly as I see you and Miss Ainslie."

"At what date was that, Sir Wilfrid?"

"The fifteenth of August."

"Mrs. Monro," said Laura, solemnly, "died at Nice in June."

"Died! Died in June? Mrs. Thornton, you must think me mad, if you will, but I most emphatically declare that I saw her, in her usual dress—the English widow's cap, I think, caught my eye first—standing on the railway platform at Fontainebleau with Miss Wells. Don't laugh at me; I tell you the exact truth."

"Laugh! I am not likely to laugh at such a thing. What can it mean?" She put her hand to her brow for a moment, the next she exclaimed, "Amabel! It was Mrs. Dunstan! She has been with Miss Wells all this time! Rely upon it, it was she. Oh, Sir Wilfrid, you have found her!"

"Thank God!" said Amabel, in her heart, while her tears fell silently,—"thank God, she will be persuaded, she will come back; it will all come right; and yet she will know that I kept my word and her secret as faithfully as she kept her promise to me."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE WINDOW IN THE WALL.

AMABEL AINSLIE had grieved much over Janet's flight. No other fulfilment of one of her previsions was ever so unwelcome as the conviction that the marriage in which she had foreseen happiness was not happy. No other effort had been so painful to her as that by which Amabel had resolutely kept Janet's secret through all the wonderings and conjectures that followed her flight. Only to Captain Dunstan and to Julia were the real circumstances of Janet's departure known, and it was never suspected that Amabel had any farther knowledge. She accepted without comment Mrs. Cathcart's suggestion that the matter was not to be discussed with profit, and she scrupulously avoided mention of it.

Of Captain Dunstan she had seen very little since the early summer. Janet had not been named between them.

In the consultation which ensued on Laura's elucidation of Sir Wilfrid's statement, Amabel joined, without letting it be discovered that she had previously known anything. She earnestly entreated Sir Wilfrid to carry the news to Captain Dunstan, and to accompany him, if, as she did not doubt, he should decide on going in search of Janet.

"I believe there is no one in the world who could speak to her with such effect as you could," said Amabel; "and she is too just to refuse to see you. None of us can tell whether she might not entirely refuse to see Captain Dunstan. And then Miss Wells thinks so highly of you, she will take your view."

It was agreed that this should be done. Laura thought there was a perceptible readiness on the part of Sir Wilfrid Esdaile to accept Amabel's judgment on that and every other point. Laura was deeply interested in this sad story, but it was not until afterwards that she came to the knowledge of the large part she herself had unconsciously played in it.

On the following morning Sir Wilfrid Esdaile left Hunsford, and the first meeting between the friends since that memorable day on which he had quitted Bevis a rejected suitor to Janet Monro, took place a few hours later.

Dunstan met him at the railway station, and, before they reached Bevis, Esdaile, to whom he had not meant to mention Janet at all, told him the news. Two days later they left England together, and travelled rapidly to Nice. Sir Wilfrid Esdaile was readily recognised at the hotel in the old part of the town, whither he proceeded, unaccompanied in the first instance by Dunstan, and, on inquiring for Miss Wells, he learned that she was not there just then. Miss Wells had, of late, been a good deal away from her headquarters since shortly after the English lady's death; she had gone away then for three months.

"Did she return alone?" asked Sir Wilfrid, of the proprietor of the hotel, who held his eccentric English *locataire* in great respect, and was ready to give any information to a friend of hers.

No, not alone, and the strange thing was that the lady who came with her might have been the twin sister of the poor little lady, so sad and gentle, who died in the summer. They had all been astonished—it was like seeing a ghost; but, after all, there was nothing surprising; the new lady was the near relation of the other, and of the same name. The proprietor never wasted time in the vain attempt to pronounce that name.

After a short stay, Miss Wells went away again, taking her friend with her. No, he could not tell his excellency where they went to; Miss Wells did not send them an address; her letters were not forwarded when she was away, and he could not say positively when she might be expected to return. She would come back undoubtedly, only the exact time was uncertain, and it was also sure that she was not returning alone, for she had given orders about certain changes in her rooms, on account of the new lady. This was satisfactory to a certain extent, and Sir Wilfrid proceeded to act on the information he had elicited. He inquired whether the rooms adjoining Miss Wells' apartment were vacant, and learning that they were, engaged them for himself and a friend from that day. He then wrote a few words on a card; this he put into an envelope addressed to Miss Wells, to be given to her immediately on her arrival. In fact, he saw it tucked under her key, which hung on its numbered hook in the bureau, before he returned to Captain Dunstan, at the Hôtel de France, and reported progress.

To them both it was a disappointment to find that they must wait, and for an uncertain time, before they see Janet. They had discussed the matter very little during their journey, and now the very closeness of the confidence between them, and the associations of the past, rendering them averse to speak upon the subject of which they were thinking most, the delay, with its restraint, and its prolonged excitement, became irksome to them. There was a ready resource; time need not hang heavily on their hands; with the sight of the place the former fascination of the gaming-tables for Esdaile revived. Dunstan had no particular love of play, but he was restless and nervous, and he wanted to kill time.

Three, four, five days passed away; there was no sign of Miss Wells' return, and when the regular inquiry, made by Sir Wilfrid each morning, had received the regular reply, the two young men would leave their dull hotel for the fashionable quarter, and speedily find themselves with the rest of the world at Monte Carlo.

It seemed as though fate were bent on doing Sir Wilfrid Esdaile an ill turn by this delay, for he not only fell into the old temptation, but the devil's luck declared itself for him, and he won largely and continuously. Presently he came to be talked about, just as a gentleman who is lucky on the turf, becomes unconsciously a hero, to the theoretically horsey idlers who lurk and slouch about the scenes the mysterious transactions in which he has won distinction.

Their sojourn at Nice had lasted for ten days, when Esdaile, having turned into the bureau one morning, as usual, to ask his invariable question, found himself a spectator of a row. The parties to the quarrel were the stern and business-like lady who presided in the bureau, the proprietor of the hotel, and a waiter, the identical person who was in the habit of waiting on Esdaile and Dunstan. Esdaile immediately withdrew, having heard only the curt order of the proprietor to the misdemeanant to "make his packet, and go, on the field." The man was civil and quick, though an ill-looking fellow—a Nizzard of the hard and dark type, and singularly taciturn. Esdaile had noticed him, because, as neither Dunstan nor himself had a servant with him—this precaution against "talk" being carried back to Bevis, had been suggested by Mrs. Cathcart—the man was in constant request. He passed him presently, at the *porte-cochère*, with a civil bow, and Esdaile returned to the bureau. The irate proprietor was no longer there; the lady in charge was adding up a column of figures with angry energy, and, interrupting herself to answer Sir Wilfrid's question, she could not repress an allusion to her grievance. Never was there known such a *corvée* as the managements of those *garçons* nowadays. And Giuseppe had been a pearl, a true pearl until now, when his insolence all about a nothing, a miserable little

nothing, had procured him his *congé*, for the patron never would suffer insolence. And a nothing! Any one would think Giuseppe had done it expressly for the very purpose of being turned out. But she begged pardon—no, there was no news of Miss Wells this morning more than another. Presently Dunstan and Esdaile went out for the day.

The business of the hotel, not very brisk, went on just as usual. Giuseppe and his modest packet—he carried it ostentatiously with a scowl past the bureau and out of the front door—were gone, and the afternoon was drawing towards dusk. There was no stir about the entrance or in the court of the old hotel, and for the moment the bureau was unoccupied. This moment must have been watched-for by a man who, coming through the open gateway, paused in front of the green-curtained glass door and listened for a moment, then boldly entered. He was not in the bureau for a minute, but he came out of it with a key hidden up his sleeve, and then he quietly turned to the staircase on the right, and with perfect unconcern ascended it. True, Giuseppe was a dismissed servant, and he had no business there; but, if any one should meet and question him, there was a ready answer in the incompleteness of his packet—something forgotten in the *combles* where he had slept, and his neglecting to use the *escalier de service* would be only an impertinence the more. Fortune, who, if she favours the brave, is not always unkind to the dishonest, was propitious to Giuseppe; he met no one, he experienced no alarm, and he let himself into the little vestibule of Miss Wells' apartment with ease and safety. He then passed, with a noiseless tread, through the suite of rooms, and reaching the last of them, profited by the still lingering light to make certain arrangements in a business-like manner. The furniture of the room had undergone some alterations since the time of its occupation by Mrs. Monro; but the large table, with its ranges of books and papers, still occupied its former position, across the door of communication with the adjoining apartment. Giuseppe cleared the books and papers away, and, having thus lightened the table, he drew it along the wall so carefully that a passer-

by in the corridor outside must have had quite ears to hear a sound, thus leaving the door of communication free. Then he easily picked its old-fashioned lock, and, throwing it open, looked into the room on the other side.

Apparently he only wanted to look in, for he softly shut the door again, and, having deposited a pocket-lantern and a box of matches on the floor in a corner, he selected a particularly comfortable chair, and placing it in the shelter of the bed-curtains, so near to the wall that any sound in the next room would be audible to him at once, he sat down and waited. Waited, while the darkness fell, and the stars came out, and the unoccupied rooms turned chill and ghostly; waited with set purpose, and quiet patience. One could not account for accidents, but he had taken his precautions admirably, and the causes he might have for fear were reduced to their minimum. He munched a slab of chocolate, and waited. The ordinary noises of the hotel, as night fell, came to his ears; then the entry of the chambermaids into the adjoining room, and their departure; after this no sound for a long while. And then the sound that Giuseppe was waiting for.

It was that of the voices of the English excellencies, who were such good friends and good comrades—in his ordinary business Giuseppe would not ask better than to serve them—and one of whom was so wonderfully lucky at the tables that it might almost be believed he had drawn a good number *pour tout de bon* only for this stroke of extraordinary business which Giuseppe was about to do, whereby the luck of the English excellency would be crossed. He waited while the friends talked, he heard them laugh (his ear was at the keyhole now), he heard another sound, sweeter than any laughter, the musical clink of gold, as the English excellency who had the devil's luck threw a handful of tinkling pieces on the table; he heard the only English phrase whose meaning he knew—it was "good-night"—spoken by each, and then there was silence, and he waited again, a long while, it seemed to him, for the light to be put out in the room of the excellency who had the devil's luck.

At length it occurred to Giuseppe that perhaps the

excellency did not intend to put out the light at all. With cat-like agility and noiselessness he climbed on the table, and, standing on one end of it, steadied himself with one hand against the door, while he looked through the little window in the wall. He looked into a large, dingy, but not uncomfortable room, well lighted, and with a pleasant fire of red logs upon the open hearth. In front of the hearth was a *fauteuil,* and in it reclined Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, sound asleep ; a half-smoked cigarette was between his lips. Giuseppe's eager gaze which took in every feature of the scene, dwelt with the eagerness of greed upon the table at Esdaile's elbow. There, scattered in careless profusion, lay the devil's luck, in the form of a heap of gold and notes, and a bulky pocket-book. An open book also lay upon the table. Esdaile had been cutting its pages open with Dunstan's dagger, that fine thin blade in a carved tortoise-shell sheath which he had bought at Galle, in the days before he was rich enough to lend an ear to the blandishments of the traders in "catty eye," "pinkee collal." An alcove, which contained the bed with the curtains, which were snugly drawn, faced the door in the wall.

As things were going, Giuseppe might have long to wait; the English excellency slept with such unembarrassed ease in his *fauteuil* that, while the fire kept the temperature even, he was not more likely to wake than if he were in his bed. Time was growing precious, for, although Giuseppe knew a way of getting out of the hotel without resorting to *concierge* or *cordon,* he would rather not avail himself of it, if he could contrive to slink out again by the entry as he had slunk in. He stepped softly down, gently pushed the door open, and gliding through the aperture, approached the table without making the slightest sound. At this instant one of the red-hearted logs tumbled over and struck the ash-tray, rousing Esdaile, who opened his eyes and shifted his position. Still as a stone stood Giuseppe behind him, holding his breath, his eyes glittering and terrible.

Esdaile moved again, threw his arm out, and knocked the open book off the edge of the table. It fell just behind him, and the dagger dropped at Giuseppe's feet, who put his

arm down and felt for it on the ground, but without shifting his eyes from Esdaile's head, which showed above the back of the *fauteuil*. Again Esdaile moved, and this time he pushed the chair upon its castors so that he was turned half away from the hearth, half towards the door in the wall; and only a movement, as instantaneous as it was noiseless, enabled Giuseppe to shift his own ground and escape detection. That half-turn of Esdaile's, rendering Giuseppe's retreat by the door in the wall impossible, made a portentous change in the situation. Giuseppe's scheme, which he had been maturing for several days, was strictly limited to robbery. The English excellency asleep, Giuseppe meant to enter the room, secure his booty, leave the room in the same way, replace the table to bar the door of communication, restore everything to its usual appearance, and decamp in safety. But now the man whom he had come to rob was only half asleep, and he faced the table on which lay the devil's luck, and half faced the door.

"So much the worse for him—his luck has turned. I shall have to kill him now."

With this thought, Giuseppe—his hand closed upon Dunstan's dagger—fell back, step by step, until he reached the alcove. He glided behind the curtain, and waited, until the swift moments should decide whether Esdaile would wake up completely, or drop again into a deep sleep.

Long after the sober business of the old hotel was supposed to be concluded for the night, there arose a hubbub in the bureau, where the *concierge* was loud in protest and vehement in apologies. Miss Wells and her friend had arrived; no preparation was made for them; no message had been received.

"That comes of trusting people to send one's telegrams," said Miss Wells. "Henceforth I do my own wiring."

It was unfortunate, but it could not be helped. Miss Wells and her friend had been detained for several hours in consequence of an accident on the line; this also was unfortunate, for her friend was in delicate health.

A small procession escorted the ladies to their apartment

with luggage, lights, and a basket of firewood ; in short, with everything except the means of getting into the rooms. The key, although the right number was on its leaden label, taken off the numbered hook in the bureau, would not unlock the door, and consternation ensued. There was nothing for it but to fetch a locksmith, and in the interval Miss Wells seated herself on a box and looked over her letters, while the lady of the bureau, with whom nothing had gone right since Giuseppe's unaccountable conduct on that day, took such care as she could of Janet. One of the communications which had been awaiting Miss Wells gave her so much satisfaction that she was ready to meet every inconvenience with good humour.

"I accidentally discovered that Mrs. Dunstan is with you"—these were the words written on Esdaile's card—"to the great relief and joy of us all. I have come here to see you on behalf of Captain Dunstan. I am staying in the house. Say nothing to her, but let me know when you can receive me."

How thankful Miss Wells was ! How doubly glad that the person to intervene in this matter was Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, the friend of former dark days, and a paragon of perfection in her eyes. She looked upon Janet as she would have looked upon one who was going through the phases of an illness, and concerning whom the bystanders must have hope and patience. The "turn" would come, and then the convalescence ; meantime her care and tending of that sick soul, for the sake of Janet herself, for the sake of her dead friend, for the sake of her own mission in life, had been tender and vigilant. And now the "turn" was near ; with her husband's message would begin the healing of Janet's "grievous wound," and the dawn of better days, when she should be brought to accept this mortal life as it is, and to discard her dreams of it as it can never be.

"I will see him to-morrow," said Miss Wells to herself, "while she is taking a long rest."

The door was now opened, the luggage carried into the ante-chamber, fires were lighted, and, while Miss Wells, in the *salle-à-manger*, was discussing the possibilities of supper,

Janet found her way to her own room, and, declining any aid, shut the door upon the bustle of their unexpected arrival. Except for the light she carried, the room was dark; the gloom was grateful to her, and she set the candlestick on the lofty mantelpiece, took off her bonnet and cloak, and seated herself with her back to the feeble light in a chair near to the wall. She was tired, but her thoughts were clear, and they were on a track which they had been following all that day—the investigation of her own will, of her own life, of perception that she had been altogether wrong, not so much in what she had done as in the scheme of possibilities which she had constructed for herself. That track which, it may be, after many windings, with inconceivable quickness, leads the human spirit into the liberty and light of the message:

"I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt have no other gods but Me!"

"No" other—not the fairest fancies, not the loftiest ambitions, not the purest affections. That was the liberty, that was the light towards which Janet was being led, and the emancipation, the dawn, were close at hand. She was thinking, with remarkable clearness, considering the surroundings, when a startling sound, on the other side of the door, caught her ear. It was a deep groan, and it drew Janet up, rigid and horror-stricken, on her feet. Only for an instant did she stand thus, the next she perceived that light from the inner room was reflected on the little window in the wall over her head. Once more came the dreadful sound. It never occurred to Janet that the door was unlocked, although she saw with the instantaneous perception of terror that the table was drawn away; but with a great exertion of strength she pushed it sufficiently far back into its former place to enable her to stand on it and reach the glimmering glass. In a moment she was looking into the room.

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile had fallen forward on the table where the gold and the notes had lain, his arms were stretched out, his face, white and ghastly, was lying on his right arm; he was bleeding profusely from a wound in the neck, and the dagger had been thrust under one of his nerveless hands.

For one moment Janet saw only this, and even as she tried to utter a cry, but was seized with the dreadful dumbness of horror, she felt the door against which her body was pressed shaken, and the latch on the other side moved. Then she shrank away for an instant, again a desperate effort to push the door open was made; but the weight of the table with her own added to it resisted the attempt, and the assassin, suddenly apprised that his plan of retreat was foiled, stepped back into her sight. She saw him plainly; it was the hotel servant, Giuseppe.

For one instant he looked around, as if at bay, the next he walked quickly towards the other door, on the same side as the hearth; this opened into an ante-room which gave on the corridor. Here something arrested his steps; he slid back, and in a moment was again hidden by the curtain of the alcove.

Then Janet, stone-dumb, with burning eyeballs, and icy hands that clutched the wall, saw the door on the same side with the hearth open, and a man enter the room. She heard the exclamation he uttered as he rushed to the *fauteuil*, and raised Esdaile's lifeless body in his arms. He saw the wound, he saw the dagger, he knew what it meant; the fool who had done this deed forgot that, although men kill, they do not rob themselves. Where was the money—the devil's luck—gone to? He rolled a handkerchief tight, pressed it against the wound, and tied another handkerchief over that, not daring to let the blood flow while he gave the alarm. While he was bending over Esdaile, his back was turned to the alcove. Then Giuseppe stole out once more, and Janet saw him. He must get out of the door of the ante-room by which the man had come in, unseen, if possible; if not, then the other excellency's luck would have turned also, and he should be obliged to kill him too. So Giuseppe swung his large blue cotton pocket-handkerchief into a wisp, knotted the ends, and glided out with it ready in his hand.

He was close upon the group beside the hearth; the door lay open, the man's back, as he bent over his friend, was turned towards him; in another moment he would have crept past, and out into the darkness, into safety; but

Janet, who saw his terrible face, and the knotted throttling-cloth, perceived in these no other design than murder. Then the bonds of her dumb terror were burst, and she dashed her clenched hand through the little window in the wall with a loud and piercing cry—"Edward! Edward!" It had hardly rung through the room ere Dunstan had the assassin by the throat.

There was no hope from the first. She could hardly have survived the shock, the doctors said, even though she had not been fatally injured by the fall. Miss Wells knew she was mortally hurt when she lifted her. She suffered little, and was very quiet, speaking so rarely that they were not sure at times that she was conscious; but they took the chance of this, and said everything to her which they wished her to know, especially that Esdaile was recovering from his wound, and that Amabel would soon be with her. She was little moved, but she understood them; she would listen when Dunstan spoke, and follow him with her eyes when he moved about the room. They thought she did not remember where she was, but fancied she was at Bevis, for she said, on the third day, distinctly:

"I should like to see Mrs. Thornton just once;" and when they assured her that Mrs. Thornton would certainly come to her, she dozed for a few moments, and said, on waking: "We will walk on the stone terrace, and I will tell her."

Miss Wells telegraphed to Laura, who started for Nice at once; but Janet was there no longer when Laura arrived. On the same spot where she had been told of Robert's death, Laura stood beside the fair, fading form in which the lofty and loving spirit of Dunstan's wife had dwelt for its few earthly years.

"You saw her living?" she whispered to Amabel.

"Yes. I arrived a few hours before the end. I heard her last words; they were feebly, but distinctly uttered: 'Thou shalt have no other gods but Me.'"

There was a long silence, then Laura asked:

"How does he bear it?"

"I did not think he could have felt anything so deeply."

"Poor fellow!"

Laura laid rich roses on the pillow, by the side of the fair, calm face that was not to shrink with pain from the thought of her any more, and went away back to England.

"She was worth a million of me," thought Laura, as she caught the last glimpse of the Bay of the Angels, and the sun was shining on the sea, as if winter and wreck were not, "and Robert was worth a million of Edward Dunstan; yet they are gone, and we are left. Why? Ah me! why?"

It did not come into Laura's mind that perhaps that difference of value may have furnished the "why?"

A party of three are enjoying the cool and scented evening air in the wide verandah of John Sandilands' bungalow, which has a comfortable, not to say elegant, appearance in these days; for Julia, who demands something more of her dwelling than space and shelter, rules there well and wisely. A year has passed since the events which are now a tale that is told occurred. The party is composed of John Sandilands, Julia, and Mr. Gilchrist; the latter has the liveliest regard for these young people, and is happily convinced that they would not go "home," even if they had made their fortune. Mr. Gilchrist, arrayed in a suit of white, almost too spotless for belief, is walking up and down the verandah with a springy and juvenile step, and his face is rippling all over with smiles. John and Julia are ensconced in their respective big Cingalese chairs, and a bamboo-table, laden with letters and newspapers, stands between them.

"Read it out again for me, my dear," says Mr. Gilchrist, coming to a standstill by Julia's side; "although she writes the same in her own letter, and tells me how she wore my poor coral on the happy occasion, I should like to hear it read out again."

Julia complied:

"'On the 9th instant, at St. Stephen's Church, South Kensington, London, by the Rev. Charles Cathcart, Vicar of St. Mary's, Wold, Suffolk, Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, Bart., to Amabel, only daughter of Claudius Ainslie, Esq., of The

Chantry, near Bury St. Edmunds.' Amabel was married from Mrs. Thornton's house in Prince's Gardens, you know," added Julia.

"Very nice indeed, very nice," said Mr. Gilchrist, "only I think Ainslie ought to have hinted at his thirty years as a civil servant. 'Late of Bombay' would have been graceful. However, that's a matter of taste. The matter of fact is that the best girl in the world has got a husband almost worthy of her. The second time he came out here, I felt sure all would be right with Tom Esdaile's boy."

With this Mr. Gilchrist walked off, and smoked many congratulatory cheroots among the oleanders.

"John!" said Julia, "do you think Laura will marry Captain Dunstan? Do you think he will ask her?"

"I don't know. I don't think. Not for many a day, at all events."

"And then, suppose each of them should live to contrast the other with a vanished figure?"

"Not much fear of that, my dear. They would be very happy, I am sure. They are admirably suited to each other, and, as he is destined always to be lucky, she would be just a little too good for him."

"You are rather hard on Captain Dunstan, just as I used to be. No, John, the only two persons who would have been an absolutely perfect match in feeling and in purpose, whom I have ever known, were Janet and Mr. Thornton. And those two never even met."

"Of course they did not. What would you have? But Janet could not have been happy under any circumstances, because she would always have looked in human nature for that which is not in it, and she would have expected from the world that which it has not to give."

"We are very happy, John!" said Julia.

"Very, my dear love; as happy as any two people in the world. But life, as Janet dreamed of life, and love, as Janet would have had love to be would be Heaven, and Heaven is not here."

THE END.

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